The Spanking Adventures of Lenk:
A Parodical Short-Story Collection
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Author's Note

These short stories were written independently, and are intended to be read as standalone tales, in any order. Though the protagonist bears the same name across all these stories, they do not all take place in the same shared universe or continuity. Think of them as a series of loosely related tales and legends, not as a cohesive novel. The short stories published in this book have been edited from versions which were previously published for free online.

Four stories in this collection were written in collaboration with Gojira, and are included here with permission from the co-author.

Many of these stories prominently feature depictions of corporal punishment. These scenes are intended to serve the purpose of providing realism and drama. It is the belief of the author that these scenes are essential to the plot and accurately reflect the culture and values of the medieval fantasy world depicted. This work is intended as a satirical work of parody, for a mature audience. Reader discretion is advised.

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

The Little Mother of the Nibelung

Chapter I: Lost

"I'll show Medo! He'll never call me a coward again!"

Lenk swaggered as he followed the path Medo had given him to navigate the Forever Forest. After a fierce argument with Medo about whether Lenk would ever be granted a pixie companion, Medo had dared Lenk to find "Ole' Knot," the reclusive tree man who lived in the Forever Forest. Lenk's mission was to steal one of Ole' Knot's elderwood staves as proof he'd been there, toss a spark seed at the back of Ole' Knot's head, and make it back to Nibelung Village, the home of the children of the mist, unscathed.

Initially, Lenk refused to listen to Medo, remembering that Sarina had warned him and the other children to stay away from the Forever Forest unless she was there to guide them. Although all the Nibelung were children under the protection of the Wise Elder Tree, they all tended to see Sarina as their big sister, especially Lenk, who had thought of her as something like his mother for as long as he could remember.

He knew she wasn't really his mother. She couldn't be. She was only a few years older than he was. Lenk was sure he had once had a mother. But whenever he had asked about his mother and father, the other Nibelung had always told him, "The Wise Elder Tree is our father."

Of all the children, only Sarina had ever confided that she remembered Lenk had once had a mother. When Lenk had asked what had happened to his mother, Sarina had answered, "I'm sorry, Lenk. But she is lost."

Lost. To be lost, was to be lost forever. Lenk knew he would never see his mother again. But he rarely dwelled on it. After all, the Nibelung all had Sarina to take care of them, their "Little Mother."

Normally, Lenk would never dream of disobeying Sarina. But, oh so slowly, yet oh so surely, Medo's cutting remarks had worn down Lenk's resolve.

Lenk's cheeks burned as he remembered how Medo had flexed his arms, trying to make himself seem bigger than Lenk. "You think the Wise Elder Tree will ever give a pixie to a chicken like you? The Great and Powerful Medo would never hesitate to claim one of Ole' Knot's sticks as a prize!"

(The Great and Powerful Medo loved to refer to the Great and Powerful Medo in the third person.)

Lenk clenched his teeth as he marched through the wild grass. If this was what Medo considered a test of courage, it was all too easy. Lenk had followed Medo's directions perfectly: go north, turn west, turn south, turn west, and sure enough, there was Ole' Knot taking a nap right where Medo said he would be. With skin like tough tree bark and hair like foliage, the plump little creature was snoozing comfortably under his favorite tree, a snot bubble at the end of his round, stumpy snout.

Watching carefully from behind the thick grass, Lenk's anger at Medo faded, replaced by a sense of crushing guilt. Ole' Knot had never done any harm to Lenk. But wasn't Medo right after all? Hadn't the Wise Elder Tree himself told Lenk that he would not be granted a pixie until the time was right and Lenk was ready to show true courage?

Lenk steeled himself. After all, stealing one stick and interrupting Ole' Knot's nap would do no harm, but it would prove to Medo once and for all that Lenk was no coward.

Stepping on tiptoe, Lenk snuck towards the collection of carved staves of elderwood resting against the trees behind the slumbering Ole' Knot. As Lenk pulled one free, the

others tipped over, but Lenk caught them just before they could clatter to the forest floor.

Exhaling with relief, Lenk made his way back to the thick grass, pulled a spark seed from his pouch, and took aim. Not wanting to hurt Ole' Knot, Lenk tossed it half-heartedly so that it only bounced lightly off the back of his head.

As Ole' Knot bounced to his feet with a high-pitched squeak, Lenk couldn't help but grin as he turned to rush down the hollow forest path from whence he came. All he had to do was reverse the directions Medo gave him, and...

Behind him, Lenk heard a sharp pop, like a carpet beater being whipped across a rug. As he turned to look, he saw a projectile flying right towards him!

With a hearty "Thwack!" a heavy seed, several times larger than the one Lenk had thrown, struck Lenk across his back thigh, just below his left buttock. Lenk stumbled forward in shock, but at the sound of Ole' Knot's furious curses, the boy knew that he had to escape and scrambled to his feet.

Dashing with all his might, so that his floppy cap fluttered behind him, Lenk looked back and caught a glimpse of Ole' Knot stamping his spindly feet and shaking a bony fist. The old tree man couldn't keep up with the fleet-footed boy, but could spit seeds from his snout with explosive force. They struck with more strength and precision than any of the Nibelung children could ever have achieved, even with a slingshot.

Lenk ducked and zigzagged through the trees to avoid the projectiles, until Ole' Knot was left far behind him.

Lenk was safe! Pulling off his cap and resting his hands on his trembling knees, he doubled over with stitches in his sides, half from the exertion and half from suppressed laughter. What an adventure!

Running his fingers through his golden hair to wipe away the cold sweat from his brow, Lenk placed his cap back on his head and examined the stolen elderwood stick that would prove his valor to Medo.

Now, all he had to do was retrace his steps back to Nibelung Village!

But as he examined his surroundings, Lenk realized he must have run well past the forest path in the mad rush to escape.

"No matter. I just need to go north, then east, then... south? No, wait, it was south, then east, then north!"

As the sun dipped behind the trees, the sky above dimmed to a twilight blue.

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A wolf's howl echoed in the distance. Lenk had barely managed to find the path again before the sun set, so that a glimmer of moonlight peeked through the opening in the foliage above him. After second-guessing himself and backtracking twice, Lenk had carefully repeated Medo's directions, until he'd worked out the correct path. He knew the rough direction of the village, so as long as he stayed on the forest path, he knew he couldn't get lost in the dense, untamed parts of the woods. Even after his eyes adjusted to the dim light, Lenk still had to rely on his sense of touch, taking only one step at a time and feeling the ground below him to assure himself he was still on the well-trodden path. But then, he encountered something he didn't expect: a fork in the road, one leading south, the other west.

Lenk considered his situation. He knew Nibelung Village was in a general southerly direction, but he was also positive he'd wandered too far east earlier. Straining his ears, Lenk caught a strange sound: a haunting melody played on a pipe? And it was coming from the west path!

Using the stolen staff like a blind man's walking stick, Lenk grinned as he made his way west. He'd been tempted to cry out for help until the other Nibelung found him, but at the thought of the teasing he'd face from Medo, Lenk had resolved to use his wits and not give up. His chest swelled as he imagined telling Sarina how he had navigated the woods all by himself!

To his surprise, Lenk noticed a faint glowing on the path ahead. Odd? He was sure he'd have to turn south at least once to find Nibelung Village, but what else could it be than torchlight?

But as he approached, he saw the light had a cool, green hue, more like the steady glow of a firefly than the flickering of torches. The west path led into a clearing, dominated by an ancient, fallen tree, which could have rivaled the Wise Elder Tree if only it were still alive. Its stump, easily six feet in diameter, acted as the old tree's only gravestone.

Lenk gripped his staff, trembling. He had no memory of this part of the Forever Forest! As he blinked back tears, Lenk noticed something sitting on the tree stump he hadn't seen before. A childlike form, like one of his fellow Nibelung, playing a reed pipe? Lenk cried out a hail to the child, but tripped as he approached, landing in the mud and leaves of the forest floor with a wet slap.

At the sound of Lenk stumbling, the child's head snapped up from its music. Lenk dimly registered that there was something odd about the child's face, and examined its clothing: brown leathery rags decorated with green, leafy trim. Unlike the knitted caps

of the Nibelung, its hat was floppy, crowned with a tuft of ragged strips, and its wide brim covered its face in shadow.

Lenk froze as the child fixed him with shining red eyes. No... the hat didn't cover the child's face.

The child had no face at all!

Nevertheless, the faceless child seemed to cock its head at the sight of Lenk. "Are you lost?"

Though its voice was high-pitched, Lenk was sure it was a boy's voice.

Lenk spat a leaf from his lips as he lifted himself up and held his staff firmly in front of him, ready to fight if need be. "No! I'm not lost! I'm from the Nibelung Village! I know the way back! I just... took a wrong turn, I think!"

The faceless child seemed to shiver. "That's a pity. I was hoping we could be friends. You have a kind face."

Lenk relaxed his fighting pose. "Thank you! You have, uh... red eyes! Are you friends with any of the Nibelung?"

The shadowy head wagged back and forth. "No. I have to stay in the woods. But I'd like to have a friend!"

"Who are you?"

The faceless child seemed to pause to consider the question. "I don't think I have a name. But I'm a kid, like you!"

Lenk scratched his head, giggling at the thought of the kid forgetting his own name. "Well, Kid, I'll be your friend! I'll come visit you tomorrow when the sun is up. I might have a pixie guide of my own by then! ... Say, do you know the path I should take to get back to Nibelung Village?"

The faceless child nodded, slowly.

Lenk tightened his grip on his staff. "Can you show me the way home?"

The faceless child nodded, furiously, then leapt from its stump and darted south, waving to Lenk. "Follow me, friend!"

With a whoop of triumph, Lenk chased after his new friend, feeling a few twigs brush past his face as he hurried to keep up. "Slow down, Kid! I can't keep up!"

The faceless child's eyes seemed to leave a trail of red light behind them as he twisted around to shout in reply. "We must hurry! We must fly! The sun will be up soon!"

Remembering Medo's dare, and how much trouble he would be in if Sarina discovered he'd disobeyed her, Lenk sprinted to keep up with his guide, ignoring the twigs and brambles that snatched at his clothing and scraped against his bare legs. The glow of the clearing faded behind them, until they were enveloped in blackness. Only when a sharp branch scratched his left cheek did Lenk finally halt. "Ouch! Wait, Kid! I can't see anything!"

"I know."

"Well, quit running! If you take my hand–"

The red eyes appeared again. “You don’t have to run anymore. This is far enough.”

Lenk felt his face burning as he realized they had lost the path. “Wait, where are we? You said you were taking me home!”

“This *is* my home.”

“No, my home is Nibelung Village! You said–”

“I said I knew the way to Nibelung Village. I did not say I was taking you to Nibelung Village! I said I would show you the way home. Now we are home. Now we can be friends.”

Lenk froze, suddenly cold. “What are you talking about? You got us lost!”

The red eyes twisted in mid-air, as if the faceless child was craning his neck curiously. “I was already lost. I got lost a long, long time ago. Now I can’t leave the forest. Now you’re lost too!”

Lenk lunged toward the eyes, trying to grasp the kid by the arm or wrist, but there was only shadow. Lenk crashed into sharp branches that cut into his tunic and pulled his hat from his head. The red eyes blinked twice, then vanished into blackness. “Don’t worry, I’ll come back to find you! Then we can be friends forever!”

Stupidly, Lenk cried out to the faceless child, but no answer came. Then Lenk screamed for help from the Wise Elder Tree, from all the Nibelung children, and most of all from Sarina. He screamed until his voice went hoarse, and finally huddled on the ground, weeping, until he lacked the strength even to weep.

As his tears faded, Lenk felt an oppressive silence, as profound as the darkness. There was no rustling of leaves in the wind, no sound of animal life. There was only nothing.

“I am lost. I’m lost forever and ever now,” thought Lenk, and even his last thought seemed to be swallowed up.

Then, he heard a faint song. Lenk sat up, his head cracking against a branch above him. “Yeowch!!”

As he rubbed his throbbing skull, Lenk wondered if the faceless child had returned to taunt him with more pipe music. But as he listened closer, it wasn’t the same song as before, nor was it the sound of a reed pipe. It was the familiar sound of an ordinary potato flute.

“Sarina!” Lenk leapt to his feet, using the elderwood staff to stumble blindly through the darkness towards the joyful music. Then, he caught a pinprick of light behind a leaf, which seemed blinding after the long hours of darkness, and dove towards it!

Lenk crashed to the soft ground of the forest path, the stolen staff clattering to the ground in front of him, right in front of Sarina. The last note she played was a sharp whistle of surprise, in sharp contrast to her song.

“Lenk! You found me!” Her voice cracked and she smiled at the ridiculous sound of her own words. “I called your name ‘til I lost my voice. Then I played my song!”

Lenk wept fresh tears as he buried his face in Sarina’s chest. “I knew you’d come for me!”

Sarina returned the embrace, patting him tenderly on the head, then coughed. Her voice still wavered awkwardly, but there was nothing laughable about the look on her face.

“Lenk, what were you thinking? You could have been lost forever! I was so worried about you.”

Lenk pulled away to look up at Sarina, his eyes darting to the staff that he was supposed to bring to Medo. “I'm sorry, Sarina. I just wanted to explore the Forever Forest and find—”

“Oh, I know all about you pestering the Ole’ Knot. That’s where I went first!” Sarina pinched Lenk firmly by the ear with her right hand, giving the ear a delicate twist before she snatched up the stolen elderwood stick with her free hand.

Lenk yelped and instinctively grasped at Sarina’s wrist with his left hand to relieve the pressure, but thankfully she didn’t tug forcefully as she started to lead Lenk down the path home. "You're lucky I found you, Lenk. You know full well none of the children are allowed to go near Forever Forest without me. I'm going to spank you as soon as we get home, young man!”

Lenk winced, fresh tears filling his eyes. “Ow! But… Sarina! I said I was sorry!”

Sarina fixed Lenk with an all-too-familiar look. “You’re not nearly sorry enough… not yet!”

Lenk’s shoulders tensed as he struggled to keep pace with Sarina’s furious stride. It wouldn’t be the first time “Little Mother” had taken him across her knee. The long-forgotten guilt he’d felt yesterday when he’d harassed the Ole’ Knot suddenly returned with a vengeance.

"... Yes, Sarina. I promise I won't do it again. Are you going to take me to the Ole' Knot so I can apologize?"

Sarina's eyes flicked to meet Lenk's gaze once, with some sympathy, before she steeled herself and continued the furious march. Lenk felt her lighten the pressure of the pinch on his ear, though she didn't release it entirely. "Well, that's a start! At least you know you owe him an apology! But not today. He'll be grouchy for a few days, and I'm sure he'll be more open to hearing your apologies after... well, after you've both had time to cool down! Anyway, I think you've spent more than enough time in the Forever Forest for one day!"

As he thought about what awaited him back home in Nibelung Village, Lenk wasn't so sure he wanted to leave the Forever Forest after all.

But as he remembered the black, deathly silence of the Forever Forest, he felt the warmth that Sarina's song had inspired in his heart again. He felt Sarina's love for him, even as the Little Mother of the Nibelung pinched his ear and led him home.

[End of Chapter I]

The Little Mother of the Nibelung

Chapter II: Found

As the sun was still rising, Sarina's pixie companion acted as their light source along the dim forest path. Sarina had finished her lecturing, and Lenk was too ashamed to speak, so the silence was only broken by a steady thump, thump, thump as Sarina used the stolen elderwood stick as a walking staff.

As they emerged from the Forever Forest into the daylight, Sarina did not release her grip on Lenk's ear. As he felt a twinge from his ear, Lenk became painfully aware of how ragged he looked. Thanks to his mad rush into the deepest, darkest corners of the woods, his hat was lost forever, his tunic was torn in several places, and thin scratches criss crossed his legs, arms, and face.

Lenk's face burned with shame as he realized what a spectacle he would make. All the other Nibelung would guess, just by looking at him, what had happened to him in the woods and what was going to happen to him next.

As if to punish him, Lenk heard a girl's teasing voice calling out, seemingly from nowhere. "Hey! Sarina! You found Lenk? Wow, he's all messed up!"

Lenk's eyes went wide and he turned his head to find the source, only to feel a gentle tug against his captive left ear, as Sarina called out to answer the hidden girl. "Yes! But he's alive and unhurt. That's what matters!"

Sarina angled her head, and Lenk followed her line of sight up to find the source of the voice. Above them, Fado was peeking her blond head out from the lookout post, resting on her elbows. "Unhurt, huh? Not for long, I take it! Are you going to give him his smacking now, or wait 'til you get home?"

Fado was kicking her feet behind her, eagerly, as if everything happening in the world below her was a show for her amusement. Unable to look Fado in the eyes, Lenk hung his head, wondering if everyone was looking forward to watching him get his just deserts.

Sarina fixed Fado with a withering stare. “That’s none of your business, Fado. He’s not the first Nibelung I’ve caught wandering in the Forever Forest alone. As you might recall!”

Fado’s sly grin vanished, and she backed away from the edge of the lookout post, her hands flying to shield her own bottom. “Yes, Sarina! I’m glad you found him! I’ll just sit up here, and, uh… mind my own business!”

It seemed that even at a distance, no one was safe from Sarina’s warning look. At the sound of the exchange, the other Nibelung rushed to hear the news of Sarina’s rescue attempt. Tila, an energetic girl fond of wearing her short brown hair with a headband, giggled at the sight of Lenk. Mono paused his efforts to haul stones for his rock garden, brushed his lanky red-gold hair from his eyes in disbelief, and rushed to call his brothers, Shiri and Kyōda.

Lenk wondered hotly if he was about to hear a helpful lecture from the three identical “Know-it-All Brothers” on how he never should have gone into the Forever Forest in the first place. All the homes emptied as news traveled amongst the Nibelung and their pixie companions. There could be no secrets long kept in a place as small as Nibelung Village. But worst of all, Medo rushed to the front of the small crowd, before slowing his pace and swaggering toward Lenk and Sarina, grinning from pointy ear to pointy ear. “Well, well, well! The Hero of Nibelung Village makes his triumphant return… with his tail between his legs? … Yikes!”

Medo shut his mouth with a snap as Sarina whipped up the stolen elderwood stick in her hand. She checked her swing just in time to avoid cracking Medo across the skull, but she did press his nose lightly with the butt of the stick. “It seems Lenk was under the impression that if he stole a staff from Ole’ Knot, it’d prove he was ready to have a pixie of his own. I wonder who put that fool idea in his head?”

Medo glowered at Lenk venomously. “You ratted me out to Sarina? I hope she tans your hide–”

Sarina tapped Medo’s nose almost playfully with the stolen stick, sending him staggering back a few steps. “No, Medo. Lenk didn’t tattle on you, but you just tattled on yourself!”

“Oooo!” cooed Fado’s voice from above, unable to resist the dramatic scene unfolding before her, before a furious look from Sarina sent her scuttling back from her ledge on the lookout post. “Sorry! Minding my own business!”

Crossing his arms, Medo puffed up his chest. “Well, so what? It was just a joke. How was I supposed to know he’d take it so seriously? As the leader of the Nibelung–”

Sarina whipped the staff up with a flourish and slammed the butt of the stick into the ground before her. “The Wise Elder Tree just asked you to keep an eye on the entrance to his grove for those monstrous plants that have been popping up. That doesn’t make you our boss, Medo. If you want to be a leader, start by taking some responsibility. I’ll meet you at your treehouse later to discuss the matter!”

Lenk’s ears perked up at this news. Because the Wise Elder Tree was their father, none of the Nibelung children could be called “the leader.” Sarina’s nickname of “The Little Mother” was just that: a nickname, not a formal title. Even if she spanked one of the younger Nibelung, she never once did it by force. A misbehaving Nibelung got

punished by Sarina if it was perfectly obvious he or she deserved it, as an agreed-upon alternative to being sent to face the Wise Elder Tree himself. And the Wise Elder Tree had been making fewer and fewer summons recently.

Medo had been claiming the title of "The Leader" ever since the Wise Elder Tree had spoken to him and Sarina a few weeks ago, but this was the first Lenk had heard of monsters near Nibelung Village.

Lenk could practically feel every one of his fellow Nibelung wondering the same thing.

Medo swallowed and met Sarina's gaze, painfully aware that all eyes were now on him rather than Lenk. "Why can't we discuss it right here and now?"

Sarina smiled with such sweet sincerity, it was stunning. "Don't be silly, Medo! You don't want everyone listening in! Besides, I have to take care of Lenk first!"

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When they finally reached Lenk's treehouse, Sarina let go of his ear and pointed up the ladder.

"Be brave, Lenk. Climb up to your room and face what's coming to you."

Shamefaced, Lenk could only nod and obey. He felt a chilling wind through the ragged remains of his tunic as he scaled the ladder to his treehouse. He had never felt so exposed.

Sarina tucked the elderwood stick into her belt, and shimmied up the ladder after him, before lightly hopping up to the porch from the last rung. As she looked down on him with sad eyes, it dawned on Lenk how short he still was standing next to her.

Sarina rested the staff against the wall, and gestured to the dresser and wooden stump at the center of the room that served as both seat and table. “You know what to do, Lenk.”

Lenk swallowed a lump in his throat, but obeyed. Resting on his dresser was a sturdy elderwood hairbrush, with a carved image of a red tree branch on the back, Lenk’s own handiwork.

Lenk trembled as he picked the hairbrush up, turning to face Sarina who had already seated herself primly on the smooth wooden stump and held out her hand. After offering her the brush, Lenk slowly began to bend over her lap, only for her to place a hand on his chest to stop him. “Wait, let’s get you cleaned up first!”

To his surprise, Sarina’s pixie guide fluttered out from the breast of her tunic and began to circle him, its wings tinkling musically. Lenk felt a burning sensation across the many scratches on his legs, arms, and face, and as the warmth faded, he found himself healed. Sarina began to gently brush Lenk's hair, and for a moment, he felt a sense of calm wash over him, until the brush caught on a twig tangled in his hair.

“Yow!”

Sarina giggled at his distress. “Lenk, you’re a mess! Looks like there’s no scarring, thankfully. Too bad my pixie can’t do anything for your tunic! Do you have a spare?”

Lenk turned his face away, avoiding looking Sarina in the eye. He never knew what to say when he was in these situations.

Sarina sighed, but her voice was understanding. “Lenk, I want to get this over with as much as you do. You know my rule. I don’t spank another Nibelung unless they accept it willingly. Not unless–”

“Unless I’d rather go to the Wise Elder Tree?” Lenk snapped, his temper burning away his embarrassment. “Well, maybe I want to do just that. I don’t care if he gives me a switching. Why hasn’t he spoken to me in a month?”

Sarina’s eyes went wide, but not just with simple surprise. Lenk saw a flicker of fear, even anguish, before Sarina hid it behind her motherly composure. “Lenk, we can’t bother the Wise Elder Tree over this. Right now, he’s–’

“Angry with me?” Lenk clenched his teeth, tightening his fists until his knuckles were white. “Is this because of how I bothered him about my nightmares? Maybe Medo’s right. It’s my fault for running to the Elder Tree crying for a pixie every time I have a bad dream. Last time, all he said was he’d send me a pixie when I was ready to show true courage. What does that even mean? He thinks I’m a coward!”

Sarina shook her head, urgently. “No! That’s not it at all! The Elder Tree isn’t mad at you! And, Medo’s just… ugh! Look, the Wise Elder Tree can’t see anyone right now. He’s not… feeling well.”

Lenk’s anger vanished, replaced with confusion. “What? Is he ill or something? He’s the Wise Elder Tree, he can’t get sick!”

Sarina hunched her shoulders, clutching her knees. “I don’t… I wish I knew!”

Now it was her turn to avoid looking him in the eye. As he caught a glimpse of a tear that Sarina carefully, but unsuccessfully, tried to hide from him, Lenk suddenly felt like a heel. “Sarina? I’m sorry!”

Sarina seemed to snap to attention. With a shuddering breath, she straightened herself up, dismissing whatever was bothering her. “Well, you should be, but not for that! Wait, you said ‘nightmares’? I know about the one with the horseman, and the flames. Are you having more of them now?”

Lenk conjured up the memory of the terrible dream in his mind’s eye, as vividly as if he was in its grip even now, a tall man in black armor astride a black horse, bearing down on him. “No! ... Yes? No, I’m not having other nightmares, but yes, I’m having the same one, again and again, over and over...”

“Every night?”

Lenk nodded, his face burning with embarrassment. "That’s... that’s why I ran off into the Forever Forest. I knew Medo’s dare was stupid! But I wanted to prove that I was brave. That I’m not afraid of a stupid dream!"

Sarina crossed her arms, refusing to relent. "Lenk, the brave thing to do would have been to tell Medo 'No.' Instead, you put yourself in danger and caused a lot of worry for your friends. And what did poor Ole’ Knot ever do to you? That was the part that surprised me most. Is bullying a harmless tree-man your idea of courage?"

Lenk played with the torn hem of his kilt. “No! I didn’t want to hurt him...” His voice trailed away, unable to find any words to express just how stupid he felt right now.

Sarina sighed, then set aside the hairbrush as though admitting defeat. “Well, I can’t take you to the Wise Elder Tree. His instructions to Medo and me were clear. So I suppose we’re at an impasse. If you’re not sorry, then we’ll have to wait until the Wise Elder Tree is ready to see–”

Lenk grasped Sarina's shoulder to stop her from standing up to leave. "That's not what I meant! I am sorry, Sarina... for all of it."

Pleasantly surprised, Sarina smiled and patted his arm. "I forgive you, Lenk. But to be honest, it's a choice between a trip across my lap for the spanking of your life right now, or a trip to the Wise Elder Tree for the switching of your life later. I won't look down on you whatever you choose, but if I were you, I'd take the hairbrush!"
Lenk nodded. "You're right, I want to get this over with. But, it's not because I'm afraid of a switching!"

Sarina beamed, before starting to chatter. "You should be! I've gotten a switching before, you know! It was awful! The Wise Elder Tree lowered down one of his great limbs, and asked me to lie across it. Then he swept me up and thrashed me with his smaller branches until I was a sobbing mess! I couldn't sit for a week, but I deserved it! I never decked Medo again!"

Usually, Lenk loved to sit silently and enjoy listening to Sarina's rambling stories. The fact that she liked to talk and he liked to listen made them perfect conversationalists. But Lenk had been in suspense for his punishment for what felt like ages. From the moment he'd accepted Medo's dare, Lenk had suffered a creeping, half-suppressed dread of what Sarina would have to say when she found out, and from the moment Sarina had found him and pinched him by the ear, he'd accepted that this would be his inevitable fate.

Before Sarina could cheerfully describe, in fantastic detail, precisely what it was like to get thrashed by an ancient, wise, living tree, Lenk finally put a finger delicately to her lips to pause her tale. "Sarina, it was you I disobeyed. It was you who rescued me. It's only right that you carry out my punishment. Please... I can't stand the waiting!"

Blushing, Sarina put a hand to her mouth, as if to apologize for being so silly and absent-minded. “Of course!”

As Sarina adjusted her seat and scooped up the hairbrush, Lenk lay across her lap, resting his body on the smooth wooden surface of the table. Sarina took a deep breath as she tapped the hairbrush experimentally against the seat of Lenk’s ragged tunic, suddenly more nervous than he was. “Lenk, I love you, but I have to spank you… Are you ready?”

Lenk gritted his teeth and nodded, answering only with an affirmative grunt. “Mm-hmm!”

Sarina wiped away a tear, hiding her sniffles, before wrapping her left hand around Lenk’s waist and slowly raising the hairbrush high above her head with her right hand. As the first spank with the hairbrush landed, Lenk suddenly became aware of just how ragged his tunic was, and how little protection it was going to afford him. The surface of the hairbrush spread right across a tear in the cloth that exposed Lenk’s upper thigh and white cloth breeches. On either side of the tear, the thick green wool provided a meager cushion against the implement, producing a dull, echoing thwack. But across the tear, Lenk felt the surface of the elderwood hairbrush directly against the skin of his lower bottom, a haunting omen of things to come.

Sarina set her jaw and carefully aimed ten of her hardest whacks to evenly cover most of the surface of Lenk’s bottom. With a mix of pride and annoyance, Sarina watched and listened as Lenk lay in place, perfectly still and silent. This was no surprise. Lenk was always resolute at the start of a spanking. As much as Sarina admired his determination, she also wished Lenk didn’t push himself so hard, just to seem tough.

But Sarina could afford to be patient.

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Outside of Lenk's treehouse, Fado had been strolling around, half innocently. Of course, she liked Lenk, and felt quite sorry for him being in trouble. On the other hand, it was always nice to know that someone other than herself was in trouble today!

Furthermore, Fado couldn't help but recall how Lenk had once fashioned his own slingshot, and fired a hard nut directly at her backside! Of course, the slingshot had been confiscated and sent to the Wise Elder Tree, and Sarina had assured Fado that Lenk was spanked soundly for the prank at her expense.

But Fado couldn't help but wonder if Sarina spanked Lenk with the same strictness she spanked all the Nibelung children, including Fado.

If the spanking hadn't started, maybe she could casually offer Sarina a helping hand? Or if it had ended, maybe she could offer Lenk some emotional support? Who could possibly object?

But just as Fado was about to climb up the last rung of the ladder, she heard the first tell-tale thunderclap that told all.

Fado grinned. Heavens! She had arrived just as Lenk's spanking was starting?

It was her duty to keep an eye out for important things from the lookout post above Sarina's house. But there were some things you simply had to investigate on the ground!

Cautiously, Fado raised her head just enough to peep above the floor of the treehouse. What luck! The curtain at the doorway was pinned open, and she could see everything as clearly as if it had been framed for her!

Lenk's bottom and legs faced the doorway, while Sarina sat at a perpendicular angle, so concentrated on her task that she hadn't noticed Fado.

Alas! Fado had missed her opportunity to offer Sarina any assistance. It'd be rude to interrupt! She would just have to wait until after the punishment was over!

But before Fado could lower herself back down the ladder, she caught a glimpse of Sarina lifting Lenk's kilt up over the small of his back to expose his white breeches.

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Sarina folded the torn remains of the tunic out of the way of her target. Beneath Lenk's breeches, ten bright pink marks were already beginning to swell, but Lenk remained resolutely stoic. Sarina considered her situation. She had no desire to shame or humiliate Lenk, neither did she want to scar or bruise him. But she also had to make a lasting impression. With a flash of inspiration, Sarina deliberately set down the hairbrush, making a point of letting Lenk see the object resting before him, before adjusting her seat and patting Lenk's tensed buttocks experimentally with her open hand.

She would give Lenk a few minutes to think about how that hairbrush had felt across his tunic, and to think about the sting of her hand across his thin breeches. In the many years since Sarina had accepted this maternal responsibility for Nibelung Village, she had learned that when it came to spanking a stubborn child, slow and steady always won the race.

With each spank, Lenk could feel the fire gradually spreading across his bottom, but managed to hold back tears, clenching and unclenching his fists to resist the urge to shout.

After a particularly sound stroke, Lenk's legs writhed reflexively, and he felt the tight fabric of his breeches stretch and ride up. As a sweat bead trickled down his forehead, Lenk realized the building heat was even worse than the sting of the slaps. He almost wished that Sarina would pull down his breeches, just to let the cool air relieve it! But then he caught a glimpse of the awful hairbrush resting next to his face, and the thought of feeling it against his defenseless bare bottom made him feel cold again!

***

Fado rocked back and forth on the rung of the ladder. This was a dream come true! Never again would she wonder if Sarina showed Lenk any favoritism compared to the other Nibelung children. If anything, Sarina was spanking Lenk more sternly than anything Fado had ever felt... or witnessed.

It was Fado's job to know everything that went on in Nibelung Village. Could Fado help it that she just so happened to be near-at-hand sometimes when one of Sarina's legendary spankings was taking place?

"Fado? What are you doing?"

Fado felt a shiver run up her spine as she barely suppressed a squeal. Below her, Tila had snuck up to the base of the ladder, eyeing her suspiciously.

Fado almost shouted an angry retort, before catching herself and lowering her head to whisper, “Tila? Mind your own business!”

“Sounds like sound advice! Are you peeping in on Sarina spanking Lenk?”

Fado reacted with the look of shocked indignation that is only possible when one is guilty as sin and caught red-handed. “The very idea! I just was on my way to visit and offer my congratulations to Sarina and my condolences to poor Lenk!”

Tila rolled her eyes, but she failed to hide a smile. “Oh! And I stumbled across you just as you were making your way up the ladder, no doubt. And at the sounds of what is very clearly a spanking in progress, you were quick to avert your eyes and make your way home, out of respect to ‘poor Lenk’ and Sarina’s need for privacy!”

Fado blushed as she descended the ladder, already nervous what fate would befall her backside if Tila blabbed about this to Sarina. “Of course! After all… we’ve all gotten spanked before, haven’t we? We know what poor Lenk is going through right now, so… it’s best to keep this little secret between us!”

Tila crossed her arms, flashing a toothy grin. “Of course! ‘For poor Lenk’s sake’, this will be our little secret!”

Fado hopped down from the ladder before stiffening, wondering if the noise had alerted Sarina. As Fado retreated, she covered her bottom with trembling hands, before catching Tila’s mocking expression following her. In answer, Fado gave Tila the stink eye, before pretending to stretch her fingers and fold her hands delicately behind her back.

After letting Fado retreat, Tila examined her surroundings. None of the other Nibelung seemed to be nearby. She wondered what the appeal could possibly be to tempt Fado? Surely, witnessing a spanking wasn't worth the risk of earning a spanking yourself?

Suddenly, the silence was broken by the renewed sounds of steady slaps from Lenk's treehouse. Tila realized Sarina must have paused Lenk's ordeal, only to begin it yet again!

Tila stroked her chin, recalling the last time she had found herself taking a trip across Sarina's knee. On that occasion, Tila had gone looking for the old Blade of the Mists hidden in the boulder grove, ignoring the signs indicating that it was not to be touched except in an emergency.

Based on her own experience, Tila guessed that Sarina would probably be using a hairbrush, or a wooden spoon to get her point across to Lenk.

Tila reached for the rung of the ladder. A quick peek couldn't hurt!

***

Lenk struggled to keep a silent mental count of the slaps, anything to keep his mind off the sensation of being roasted over a slow-burning fire, but as she passed one hundred spanks, Sarina increased the tempo, and Lenk lost track of his count.

At long last, Lenk started to kick his legs feebly, suppressing his cries with grunts and hums. Now that she was finally making progress, Sarina felt a surge of relief. If Lenk had

been guilty of his usual harmless mischief, Sarina would have been satisfied long ago, whether or not Lenk had been reduced to tears.

She knew Lenk was sorry, and she knew that by now his entire backside must be an even shade of pink. She could already feel the radiating heat beneath the boy's undergarments, which rode up to reveal his lower cheeks as he squirmed across her lap, revealing angry, raised welts left by the first ten lashes with the hairbrush.

Sarina paused when she finally heard Lenk let out a stifled yelp. Normally, Sarina hated long-winded lectures, but to get through to Lenk, she realized she needed to do more than blindly wail away.

Lenk felt a prickle of fear as he saw her scoop up the hairbrush, and tried to catch his breath. To his surprise, he could hear Sarina breathing hard too, as if both of them were running a race.

"Lenk," she said, her voice firm but gentle. "Do you understand why you're being spanked right now?"

Now that the first onslaught had ended, Lenk became freshly aware of his vulnerable, scorched backside. "I disobeyed you, and took a stupid dare. I was cruel to the Ole' Knot and stole from him. I was almost lost forever."

Sarina nodded, satisfied with his answer. "That's right," she said, without letting her voice betray an ounce of the sympathy she felt. "You acted like a bully and a fool, just like Medo wanted."

Sarina felt guilty as she watched Lenk hunch his shoulders, before burying his face in his arms, as if the reproof hurt worse than a thousand blows with the hairbrush.

He'd wanted to be a big hero, but now he was reduced to a naughty little boy.

Sarina promised herself that she would make it up to him. She knew that underneath the tough guy act, Lenk was a sensitive soul, but she also was resolved to teach Lenk a lesson in humility he would never forget. "We're going to try something different. You're going to count each stroke I give you with the hairbrush. Then, I'm going to ask you a question. I expect you to think carefully before you answer," Sarina firmly tapped the hairbrush twice against each of Lenk's throbbing cheeks for emphasis, "Or you can expect a caning with the stolen staff after we're done with the hairbrush. Are you ready?"

Lenk nodded, sniffing in a vain attempt to hide his tears of guilt.

***

Tila was enraptured. The passion! The drama! She'd always liked Lenk, and somehow, watching him endure his valley of humiliation only made him more admirable in her eyes.

A few weeks ago, Tila had caught a glimpse of a blond head through her window while taking a trip of her own across Sarina's knee. Ever since, Tila had suspected that Fado was trying to sneak peeks of spankings around Nibelung Village. Now she knew why!

"It's amazing, isn't it?" chimed in Fado's voice.

Tila nodded absent-mindedly, before whispering, “Yeah, Fado, Sarina keeps spanking and spanking, but Lenk just holds still and takes it! How do you–” Tila froze and did a double take over her shoulder to catch Fado peering up at her from the bottom of the ladder.

“Fado? What are you doing here? You’re gonna’ get us caught!”

Fado smirked, and didn’t bother to conceal her voice in a low whisper. “Get ‘us’ caught? I’m not the one invading poor Lenk’s privacy! What would Sarina think?”

Tila’s eyes flashed back and forth between the sound of the spanking above and her tormentor below, praying her whispers wouldn’t carry to Sarina’s ears. “Fado, you hypocrite! You were peeping yourself not one minute ago!”

“Tila, you hypocrite, you were lecturing me about peeping not one minute ago!”

Tila waved a single hand in a desperate sign of surrender. “Okay, okay! But it’s our little secret, right? Look, I get it now! You gotta see this!”

Fado beamed, as if Tila had just invited her over for a delightful tea party, before clambering up the ladder to stand next to Tila. “In that case, we’d both better keep our voices down!”

Tila tensed at the sound of the wooden rungs creaking under their combined weight. This was more than she had bargained for, but Tila pressed her finger against her lips to

delicately shush Fado. Both nodding, the co-conspirators raised their heads slowly to witness the scene unfolding in Lenk's treehouse.

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The crack of the hairbrush against the thin fabric of Lenk's undergarments was sharper than the sound of the previous punishment, though not as loud as the dense clap when Sarina had punished him over his wool tunic. Lenk roared a war cry, before biting his lip to maintain his composure. "One, Sarina!"

Sarina considered her first question, and decided to start with the basics. "What did you learn about the Forever Forest today?"

"I had no idea it was so dangerous! I'll never listen to that kid again!"

Sarina raised an eyebrow. "What kid?"

Lenk winced as he felt the aftershock of the first spank flare up, where the hairbrush raised a fresh welt. It was like a second spank all by itself. Then he finally registered the question. "The boy with no face and red eyes! I met him in the Forever Forest!"

Sarina exhaled with both relief and annoyance. "I know of him. So, that's how you were led astray from the forest path?"

Lenk nodded vigorously. Sarina contemplated whether she had time to find and spank an ethereal forest spirit today. She looked at Lenk with fresh relief. Knowing how close Lenk had come to being lost forever made her want to pull him into a tight hug and

never let go. On the other hand, it also made her want to start his spanking over right from the beginning, just for being so foolish. With a sigh, Sarina settled on a compromise. “Well, I won’t punish you for not knowing something you couldn’t have known. However…”

She landed a second blow of the hairbrush diagonally across Lenk’s left cheek, so hard that he bucked in place with a howl.

“Count two!” Sarina ordered, unmoved.

Lenk managed to cry out, “Two, Sarina!” between gasps.

Sarina raised the hairbrush ready to deliver the third stroke. “Are you ever going to explore the Forever Forest without me ever again?”

Breathing hard, Lenk paused to think about his answer. “I can’t promise that, Sarina!”

Sarina’s ear twitched. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Lenk pressed his legs together, as if wary that he was about to earn an extra spank. “You told me to think about my answers, Sarina. What happens if someone else gets lost in the woods? I’d need to help them like you helped me!”

Impressed, Sarina nodded. She couldn’t recall the last time any child had answered a question so boldly while they were laying helpless across her knee, but she couldn’t be mad. “Fair point. But you can’t be of any help to a lost Nibelung if you get lost yourself… Tell you what, I’ll take you with me next time I visit the Forever Forest. Once

you learn the paths, it's not that hard to navigate. But until then, it's off limits. Promise?"

Lenk relaxed his legs. His undergarments were starting to give him a wedgie thanks to his struggling. Sarina could see the pink color of his bottom had deepened to a pale, pasty red. Not quite the shining shade Sarina liked to see, but they were making progress! "I promise, Sarina!"

Sarina beamed as she raised the hairbrush. "Then it's a deal! Don't forget to count three! No more reminders!"

She aimed her third stroke directly at the center of his lower bottom. Where the taut breeches didn't quite cover his flesh, Lenk felt the sturdy surface of the hairbrush covering both of his sit spots! Feeling two fresh tears well up, he practically growled, "Haaa-tch! Three, Sarina!"

Sarina felt her temper rise as she remembered hearing Ole' Knot's story about Lenk's escapades. "What are you going to say to Ole' Knot when I take you to see him?"

"I'll tell him I'm sorry! I'll never bother him again! I don't care if he shoots spark seeds at me again! Or beats me with a big stick!"

Intrigued, Sarina took a closer look at Lenk's bottom. Sure enough, there was a small, splotchy bruise below his left butt cheek, in the precise shape of a spark seed. "Not a bad idea! We'll let Ole' Knot decide when I take you to see him!" Content to leave the future fate of Lenk's hindquarters up to Ole' Knot, Sarina decided to forgive Lenk for his bullying behavior and moved on to the next item on her agenda.

She landed a fourth spank, also across the center, but this time slightly higher, so that it sent a ripple across the tight cotton of Lenk's briefs and left an oval impression at the point of impact. Lenk concentrated so hard on suppressing his cries, that he forgot the count. Sarina waited a few seconds, then landed a fifth and sixth spank in quick succession, one to each cheek. "Your count, Lenk!"

"Hmm! Four! Five, six!"

Sarina pressed gently against Lenk's waist, as if to embrace him, but also to remind him of his position, ready to unleash a quick volley of spanks if needed. "No, Lenk. Just four. Stop trying to pretend it doesn't hurt, and concentrate on your count, and your answers!"

Lenk lowered his forehead to the wood surface. There is nothing quite like the smart sensation of a spanked bottom to make you feel stupid! "Four, Sarina!"

Sarina asked the first question that popped into her head. "Why did you even listen to Medo in the first place?"

Sarina was expecting to buy some time with the question, maybe get Lenk to think about the series of dumb decisions that led to his near-death experience. She thought the question might rile him up. Instead, to her surprise, Lenk started weeping, his shoulders quivering.

"I... I was... afraid!"

“Afraid of Medo? He can’t push you around anymore! You can take him!”

Lenk shook his head, his tears building to thick, shaking sobs. “Afraid… he’d call me a coward! Afraid I was a coward!”

Instantly, Sarina’s heart melted. She set down the brush at her side, out of Lenk’s sight, and gently stroked his back. “You are not a coward, Lenk. Medo says those things because you’re stronger than him now!”

“It’s not him! It’s me! I’m afraid of the nightmares! I’m afraid to go to sleep! I’m afraid of the man on the horse! I’m afraid… of everything!” Lenk melted down, crying freely so that the surface of the table below him was stained wet with tears.

Surprised, relieved, and worried all at once, Sarina let him have a good cry, stroking his head and shoulders until he wiped away the tears and tried to steel himself up again. Lenk felt her resting her right hand on his bottom, but this time with a caress, as if she wished to soothe away the red marks she had left there.

“Lenk, I’ll have you know that you’re the bravest Nibelung I know. I get nervous every time I have to spank you… Do you want to know a secret?”

Lenk’s golden hair bobbed as he perked up, curious. As he made eye contact, Sarina winked at him. “Every time I spank Medo, he cries like a baby before I land the first swat. So, next time Medo’s on your case, just keep that in mind and see if that helps!”

One of Lenk's heaving breaths turned into a giggle, before he finally slowed his breathing. "But what about my nightmares?"

Sarina considered what she could say. She knew Lenk was not originally born of the Nibelung. She had never once lied to Lenk about his origins, but neither had she told him everything: that his mother was not a Nibelung... that the Nibelung had no mothers. She had been waiting until the time was right.

But every day, Lenk was getting bigger and stronger. Soon, it would be obvious that he was not one of the children of the forest. Sarina wanted to pick Lenk up off her lap and tell him everything. Beg him to forgive her. Plead with him to spank her instead. But the Wise Elder Tree had respected the dying wish of Lenk's mother to keep his true origin a strict secret for as long as possible, to keep her son away from the strife and wars of the outside world, at least until he was old enough to face them.

Feeling a pit in her stomach, Sarina chose to let the Wise Elder Tree decide when the moment was right. "I don't know about your nightmares, Lenk, but whatever comes of them, I promise you won't be alone to face it."

Lenk muddled over Sarina's words, slightly confused, but no-less comforted.

"Now," she said, her voice gentle. "I need to bare your bottom so I can finish your spanking properly."

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Outside Lenk's treehouse, Fado and Tila struggled to suppress gasps of shock at the furious blows Lenk endured, giggles of mirth at the news of Medo being a crybaby, tears at the heart-rending sight of Lenk unburdening his soul, coos at the heartwarming sight of Sarina comforting him.

They were sure that after all that, Sarina would be satisfied. But now, a bare bottom spanking? That was withheld for only the most serious of offenses! Then again, Lenk *had* broken one of the cardinal rules of Nibelung Village.

And to their shock, Lenk seemed to accept his fate without so much as a whimper of protest? Tila and Fado's cheeks pressed against one another as they vied for a better view. Amongst the girls of Nibelung Village, it was unanimously accepted that Lenk was the most handsome of the boys, despite not being a Nibelung himself.

A high-pitched voice chirped like birdsong. "Hey! What on earth are you two scoundrels up to?"

Fado and Tila rocked dangerously on the shared rung of their ladder as they each released a hand to cover their behinds, as if Sarina were a vengeful spirit who had arrived to spank them in midair. They turned to find their two pixie companions. Tila's pixie had his arms crossed, his wings fluttering steadily. Fado's pixie rested her hands on her hips and tapped her foot as if she were standing on an invisible floor.

Tila and Fado's eyes met, each hoping for the other to offer some brilliant explanation. Their pixie companions were more than friends. They were guardians, counselors, moral guides! Unable to offer any defense, Tila and Fado looked to their fairies, waiting

for them to alert Sarina, maybe even order them to climb the ladder and politely ask to be spanked in front of Lenk immediately!

But the two fairies smiled wickedly, and flitted to sit on top of the heads of their Nibelung children. “How dare you watch this... without inviting us!”

***

Lenk’s heart raced with anticipation. He had dreaded this moment, known full-well it was coming, but had still held out hope Sarina would spare him from this final indignity. But the long spanking had worn down his stubbornness, so that now he found himself ready to accept his fate. He knew that this was the final part of his punishment, and he was determined to take it like a brave Nibelung.

Sarina gently helped Lenk to stand up and reached under the skirt of his tunic to undo the threads holding up his white breeches. Lenk’s hands flew to the knots first. “Please, Sarina! ... May I do it?”

Sarina nodded and politely turned her head away, allowing Lenk to pull down his underwear, just barely below his bottom. It was only as he glided his breeches down that he realized how uncomfortable they had been. He held the hem of his tunic down below the front of his waist, thankful for the final shred of modesty provided by the shredded remains of his tunic. Lenk felt his face burn hot as he stood there, exposed and vulnerable. Yet the cool wind that rustled through his treehouse felt comforting against his *other* set of blushing cheeks.

Lenk settled obediently back into position, flipping up the torn back of his tunic like a neat flap to reveal his reddening rear. Just as Sarina was about to begin, she caught a flicker of light in her peripheral vision, like pixie dust in the sunlight. She blinked and looked carefully at the ladder outside the door, but at the sight of Lenk's bare bottom before her, she chose to focus on the task at hand and resume the spanking, beginning with her hand, as if they were starting from the beginning.

Sarina was satisfied with Lenk's answers to her interrogation. Had he responded with sass or excuses, she had planned to extend his punishment for as long as necessary. As it was, Sarina was eager to finish Lenk's ordeal, but also determined to show no mercy until his backside shone as bright as a red apple.

Lenk already knew that he would have a hard time sitting down for the next few days. But the shame, guilt, humiliation, and pain all contrasted sharply with a new set of feelings: love, safety... and fearlessness. Lenk's tears returned. Lenk barely noticed as Sarina paused the hand spanking, the cumulative pain of the many spanks now overwhelming his ability to sense the individual slaps.

But as he felt the cool wood of the hairbrush stroking against his behind, and heard the warning taps, his last thought was one of gratitude to Sarina, and acceptance of his fate.

***

After barely ducking in time to escape Sarina's notice, Fado and Tila dared to raise their heads enough to witness the grand finale. Lenk howled and flailed as Sarina paddled him mercilessly with the hairbrush, but with only a dainty little hand holding him in place, Lenk refused to leave position or shield himself out of sheer willpower!

The illicit fun of their little escapade had long since been replaced by a sense of awe and sympathy. Both girls wanted to rush to Lenk's side and comfort him, or throw

themselves at Sarina's feet and confess all. Tila raised her head higher, forgetting any pretext of hiding, ready to shout, "Please! Spank me instead!"

But fortune intervened. Lenk kicked his left foot with such ferocity, his boot went flying across the room, through the open doorway, and smacked Tila right in the face. Fado had time to see what was happening before it happened, but was powerless to react. Tila grabbed reflexively for Fado, the rung of the ladder they were both standing on groaned and snapped in two, Fado grabbed reflexively for the top rung, the entire ladder snapped free from the deck, and they all tumbled to the ground in a mad scramble that became a final, girlish embrace, along with the two fairies who clung helplessly to the hair of the girls.

Lenk was so preoccupied by his punishment that he didn't register the commotion, but Sarina saw everything. Looking down at Lenk, she examined her handiwork. Gently, but promptly, Sarina lifted the freely sobbing boy off her lap, and let him rest his head against the table.

Peeking over the edge of the deck, Sarina recognized Fado and Tila, both out cold with befuddled expressions frozen on their faces. Sarina fumed silently, "What a day!"

She patted the breast of her shirt to alert her pixie, and sent her down to check on the two spies. As fairies were gifted with healing magic, there was nothing more Sarina could do for them, and so decided to give her full attention to Lenk for the moment.

Blubbering, Lenk wiped his tears away on his forearms, still trying to maintain his position. "Wah? What happen? Did I kick too much?"

"No, your ladder fell down. Do you have a spare?"

Lenk blinked, then blew his runny nose on the front of his tunic, struggling to remember anything that didn't involve repenting of his misdeeds and accepting his deserved punishment. "Yeah, I've got a rope ladder in the bag."

Sarina glowed with pride. "You're amazing, Lenk! Go to the corner and wait for me."

Lenk's eyes traveled to the staff resting in the corner. "Are... are you going to cane me with the staff next?"

Sarina followed his gaze to the stolen stick. Before the interruption, she had been sorely tempted to give him an additional switching, or cane him with the stolen stick to reward his thievery with a final touch of poetic justice, but Lenk had been so courageous, so obedient, and so penitent, her heart melted. "No. You took your punishment bravely, Lenk. I'm proud of you."

Lenk looked up at her, his eyes shining with tears. "Thank you, Sarina. I'm sorry for what I did to deserve it."

Sarina smiled and put her arm around him to guide him to the corner, before snatching up the stolen staff herself and hooking it in her belt. She had a sneaking suspicion it would come in handy. "You're forgiven! But don't forget you still owe Ole' Knot an apology. We'll return this to him tomorrow. If you still feel guilty by then, you can ask him if he thinks you deserve a caning. I won't make you ask him for one. It's up to you. Stand here and think about everything that's happened today until I come and release you."

Lenk nodded as he pulled up his breeches, feeling oddly comforted and forgiven, despite the prospect of a caning. Sarina basked one final time at the sight of her favorite little friend standing his vigil before turning her attention to tying the rope ladder.

She closed the door behind her, not wanting to expose Lenk to the terrible knowledge that he had been spied upon quite yet. What to do, what to do?

To Sarina's relief, her pixie reported that both Fado and Tila were not lastingly injured, though they were both taking an unplanned nap.

Sarina tightened her mouth at the absurd sight of the four miscreants in a heap on the grassy knoll. "What about their pixie companions?"

"Awake, but their wings are a bit ruffled."

Sarina let the rope ladder drop, and couldn't help but smile as the tail end of the ladder slapped lightly across Fado's upturned tail below. Signs and portents of things to come! Too bad Fado wasn't awake to appreciate it!

"I'm going to put Lenk to bed. The girls can apologize to him properly after all three wake up from their naps."

Sarina's pixie cracked her knuckles, then stretched her arms in a pantomime of paddling a pixie-sized posterior. "Don't forget to give their fairies a good hiding as well. Spying on Lenk is bad enough by itself, but a pixie guardian leading their Nibelung astray? Whatever punishment you give them, I'm doubling! In fact, I see no reason to delay while their Nibelung are recovering!"

Sarina giggled at the thought of having such a kindred spirit for a guardian! Lenk looked at Sarina curiously as she reentered his treehouse, but he didn't dare pry nor argue with the recent memory of a spanking still so fresh in his mind. "I've made my decision. I'm going to ask the Ole' Knot to cane me. And I want to ask the Wise Elder Tree to give me a switching, too!"

Sarina did a double-take, hoping Lenk was joking. “There’s no need to be a glutton for punishment, Lenk!”

Lenk shot Sarina with a determined look that would brook no argument. “I’m not afraid!”

Sarina shrugged, then ruffled his hair. “Well, I suppose we can leave the decision up to them.”

He yawned and rubbed his drooping eyes as Sarina released him from timeout and guided him towards bed.

Sarina reached for the collar of his tunic to pull it up and over his head. “Your clothes are in rags! I’ll sew them up for you!”

Lenk grasped at the hem of his tunic, blushing. “No! Please, Sarina, let me!”

Sarina released her hold, feeling silly. “Oops! Sorry, Lenk. Force of habit. I’ll step out to give you some privacy.” It was a bitter-sweet moment. She had dressed Lenk when he was left to her care as an infant. In a twinkling of an eye, she felt how those days were gone forever.

Lenk left the ragged clothing outside the door, then peeked his head out from behind the curtain. Sarina wondered if he was still shy about being undressed, until she saw he had changed into a spare tunic and cap. “Sarina? Thanks, for everything!”

Sarina answered by planting a kiss on his forehead, and left him to take his nap. She heard the flop as he dive-bombed into bed after his sleepless night in the Forever Forest.

As Sarina descended the ladder, she heard her pixie rounding up Fado's and Tila's fairies, pinching each by a wing as she guided them. "Hey! Listen! Shame on the both of you! A pixie tempting their Nibelung to such perdition? It's a disgrace to the entirety of pixie-kind!"

Just as Sarina started to scoop up Fado by the waist, the blond Nibelung stirred, and muttered shakily, "... Five more minutes, mummy!"

Sarina grinned and planted a quick smack on Fado's rump. "Oh, excellent! You're awake!"

Fado yipped like a puppy as the slap woke her up. Having just awakened from a vivid dream where she was bent over the knee and spanked in front of the entirety of Nibelung Village, Fado was too scared to speak as she dimly registered her nightmare had become reality!

To Fado's relief, Sarina set her down, only to deliver another firm swat and point toward Fado's treehouse. "March straight home and wait for me. If you're so curious about how I spank Lenk, you don't have to peep, I'll show you first hand!"

"Please don't spank me in front of all the other Nibelung!" pleaded Fado.

Sarina pretended to consider the notion, as if Fado had just given her a marvelous idea. "Hmm! That would be a fair way of teaching you to respect other people's privacy!"

Sarina produced the staff from her belt, and thwacked it against her open palm, before handing it to Fado: the convict was to carry the axe to her own execution! "After I spank you and Tila, I will give you a chance to apologize to him in person. We'll see if he thinks you deserve the dignity of privacy. But either way, you will be getting an additional switching after you apologize to Lenk. Now march, Fado!"

Fado obeyed, already resigned to her fate, desperately praying for Lenk to show her mercy.

Sarina's pixie pointed to the still-unconscious Tila with her foot. "If you're going to wait for that one to wake up, I'll get started teaching these two a lesson!" The two guilty fairies shivered so ferociously, they sent a shower of pixie dust flying. Sarina nodded and watched with pride as her pixie hauled away the two derelict fairies, who both covered their teeny-tiny, glittering butts.

Sarina sighed with disappointment at the sight of Tila, still out cold and wearing a goofy grin. "Tut, tut, Tila. I suspected Fado was skulking about trying to pry on other Nibelung's spankings. But I expected better of you!"

Sarina had been considering asking Tila to tag along with her and take on some more responsibilities around Nibelung Village. There were simply too many Nibelung getting into mischief these days!

As she hoisted Tila's limp form up and over her shoulder, Sarina considered her to-do list: first Fado and Tila, then their fairies, then Medo (and he was always a handful), then Fado and Tila would have to apologize to Lenk, which meant *another* spanking for Fado and Tila, which meant *another* spanking for their fairies!

Tila groaned and shifted her weight across Sarina's shoulder, as if she was suffering from an imaginary spanking in dreamland.

Sarina planted a playful warning clap on Tila's upturned fanny. "Hold still, Tila, I'm carrying you home!"

"... M'sorry, Sarina..." mumbled Tila, sleepily.

Sarina rolled her eyes, smiling wanly. It was impossible to stay mad at a repentant Nibelung lying bottoms-up for a spanking, no matter how naughty that Nibelung had been.

Epilogue:

Sarina had a busy couple of days. She began spanking Fado while Tila recovered. When Tila was fully awake, she found herself wishing she had never woken up at the sight! Sarina instructed Fado to carve a wooden sign that read, “I like to spy on other Nibelung when they get spanked!” This left Fado plenty of time to guess her future fate as Sarina delivered Tila’s first spanking of the day. After a serious conversation, the two tearful girls promised never to do it again. Fado even confessed to every spanking she had secretly peeped on, hoping to prove her sincerity.

Nevertheless, Sarina took Fado across her knee for round two with a wooden spoon, and Tila still had to carve her own sign while she waited for her turn. Sarina’s pixie didn’t let her forget to repeat the entire exercise with the two errant fairies, but Sarina saved time by spanking the pair both at once, her palm and the wooden spoon both easily able to cover the two teeny-tiny tushies.

The girls were made to wear the signs around their heads as they were escorted to Lenk’s treehouse to make their apologies and accept Lenk’s doom. After getting over his initial shock, Lenk was allowed to help Sarina spank the two miscreants (and their fairies) with the elderwood hairbrush. This was more than enough for him to forget his initial irritation. When Sarina jokingly suggested whether Tila and Fado deserved a public switching, Lenk was willing to let Fado and Tila off the hook without a switching entirely.

However, Fado and Tila were deeply convicted by their mistreatment of Lenk. Tila requested to be given a long, hard bare-bottom spanking in front of the entirety of Nibelung Village so that she could serve as an example to the other children. This was a bit more than Fado had bargained for, but when Sarina praised Tila for her maturity and courage, Fado volunteered for public chastisement as well. At this point, the two fairies simply accepted that they would likely be getting spanked day and night by Sarina’s pixie just to keep up. Fado and Tila were sent to go door-to-door wearing their

signs, and announce the time, place, and reason for their public punishment to every Nibelung and pixie.

Fado and Tila's public whipping was delayed to the next day. Sarina finally managed to get to Medo's house by evening, and found him furiously pacing. Initially, Medo argued furiously that he was too important to be spanked, but Sarina insisted that spanking would do him no good if he didn't have the courage to face it. To her pleasant surprise, Medo requested a spanking, and offered his own belt to Sarina. Despite his bullying demeanor, Sarina knew Medo really was eager to help the other Nibelung. Of course, that didn't stop her from blistering Medo's butt until he was promising never to bother Lenk ever again.

The next day, Sarina escorted Lenk to apologize to Ole' Knot in the Forever Forest. At Lenk's suggestion, Ole' Knot was a little too delighted to bend Lenk over his twig-like knee as revenge for interrupting his nap. Lenk discovered to his chagrin that the old tree man's palm was as hard as a wooden hairbrush, and each of his fingers as supple and slender as a switch. Lenk also stood with his hands on his knees to accept six strokes of the elderwood stick from Ole' Knot. When Ole' Knot began to wax on about how, back in his day, naughty saplings were also punished by having explosive spark seeds fired at them, Sarina intervened before Lenk could volunteer for even more creative punishment. The old tree man seemed satisfied, and offered Sarina the stolen staff as a gift to keep trespassing little children in line.

As she and Lenk walked home hand in hand, Sarina caught a glimpse of the lonely, red-eyed spirit child of the Forever Forest, hovering over a skull buried deep in the shadows. As Lenk was with her, Sarina chose to ignore the spirit for now, but made a mental note to ask the Wise Elder Tree about possible methods for capturing, and spanking, Skull Kids.

Back home in Nibelung Village, Sarina pleaded with Lenk to help her finish Tila and Fado's switching, and Lenk hesitantly agreed. He hated seeing any of the other Nibelung in pain, but he knew that Sarina was getting overwhelmed. Imagine Lenk's surprise when not only Fado and Tila, but Medo arrived at the ring of stones to accept a public spanking! At the discovery that Lenk would be acting as Sarina's assistant, Medo almost backed out in a huff, but a glance from Sarina and a few chuckles and heckling comments were enough to convince him to stick it out: and in more sense than one.

Standing with her hands behind her head, her sign around her neck pronouncing her shame, and her bottom bared, Tila watched nervously as Sarina took Fado across her knee and Lenk took a pale-faced Medo across his knee in the middle of the circle of stones, surrounded by curious onlookers. Tila saw Sarina flash a wink in her direction, before delivering Fado's first slap. It wasn't exactly encouraging, but at the memory of Lenk's courage in the face of his own just punishment, Tila felt a sense of relief. She was ready to face what was coming.

With two spankers forced to take turns punishing five spankees, the public punishment took all afternoon, and Sarina simply insisted on starting the punishment from the beginning, beginning with a hand-spanking, followed by a session with the hairbrush, the wooden spoon, the belt, a bundle of thin switches provided by the Wise Elder Tree himself, a paddle carved by the Know-it-All Brothers, and at long last, the final caning with the elderwood staff. Sarina's pixie made sure that Fado and Tila's fairies were spanked continuously, as they had been for the past day and night (pixie bottoms are surprisingly resilient due to their healing magic).

In the end, all the Nibelung congratulated Medo, Fado, and Tila for taking their licks, and even Lenk and Medo shook hands. As she watched the sight of the three bare, thoroughly spanked bottoms marching back home, Sarina congratulated herself on a job well done.

The Little Mother's work was never done, and she wouldn't have it any other way!

[The End]

Beauty in the Belly of the Beast

Chapter 1: The Great Fish

“Help me. I'm trapped inside Lord Dag-Gadol's belly.
—Lapis

PS: Don't tell my father!”

It had been a day and a night since Lenk and Neviah had discovered the message hidden in a bottle while fishing at Avalon's Lake. Lenk had wondered if it was a practical joke, until he happened upon two Merrow fishermen (a fitting occupation for the two “fish-men,” Lenk thought, given their scales and fins). After showing them the strange note, Lenk learned that Lapis was the name of their princess, and she had indeed been missing for two days. Lord Dag-Gadol, it turned out, was a great, sacred fish, renowned for his wisdom by all the Merrow.

After a week of exploring the territory surrounding the Merrow Domain looking for answers about the whereabouts of the magical Merrow Sapphire, this was the only lead Lenk had stumbled across so far. It took some persuading, but the two Merrow fishermen decided that a boy who could catch so many fish couldn’t be all that bad, for an Avalonian, so they agreed to guide him to King Merrow’s palace.

With a determined heart, Lenk knew he had to save the princess at any cost… including ignoring Princess Lapis’s instructions and telling her father, King Merrow de Bon XVI.

The king’s plump, cat-fish whiskers shivered as he examined the note. “Ho, this letter! It’s from Princess Lapis! Hmmm… Let’s see… She’s inside Lord Dag-Gadol? That’s not

possible! Our guardian god, Lord Dag-Gadol, would never eat my dear Princess Lapis! But since that stranger, Madoc Dracomere, came here, Lord Dag-Gadol has been a little green around the gills…"

Lenk waited as the King seemed to pause and consider the question. Then he waited a few more seconds. And then a few more seconds. Just as Lenk opened his mouth, the king straightened up, his belly jiggling wildly from the exertion.

"The evidence seems clear. Of course you'll go find Lapis. You can pass through here to the altar of Lord Dag-Gadol. I'll keep this letter. You keep the bottle it was in. Take it respectfully… *Merrow!*"

It took King Merrow a few attempts to roll his tremendous bulk off his seat of rest and begin to shift his weight aside, slowly opening the path to the altar hidden behind his watery throne.

The King exhaled sharply at the heroic exertion required to move his fat ass. "*Muweep!* There you are, lad! Now, run along! Oh… and if you find that Princess Lapis has disobeyed and gone playing inside Lord Dag-Gadol's mouth again, do tell her that she's in big trouble! And that she can expect a spanking from her papa as soon as she gets home!"

King Merrow raised a thin, webbed hand, and brought it down emphatically, but his arms couldn't reach far past his enormous belly. "Hmm… then again, perhaps she hasn't disobeyed. I hope she isn't in Lord Dag-Gadol's belly. I'd hate to have to spank her… That was the sort of thing I used to entrust to her mother!"

Only half-listening, Lenk nodded furiously trying to shove past the King's prodigious waist. "Yes, sir! I'm happy to help! And what about the Merrow Sapphire?"

King Merrow paused his efforts to scootch off his throne, leaving Lenk pressed dangerously between a rock and a soft, chubby place. "Hmm? Yes, yes! It is a magnificent artifact! Also, now that I think about it, given that you are such a helpful young man, could I impose upon your kindness with one minor request. If... and only if! But, as I say, *if you do* discover that my darling Puffyfish Princess *has* run away from home to play inside Lord Dag-Gadol's mouth again, would you be so kind as to... chastise her in my place? Not that I think she's guilty! She is a lovely child, just like her mother! I only mention this possibility out of respect for the great efforts you have already undertaken, and out of deference to your need to act on my behalf, as her father, *in loco parentis*, you understand, of course! Should the need arise, and should she really, truly deserve it; you, of course, have my permission to spank her!"

Lenk nodded furiously, fighting to squeeze past the King to the exit. "Yes, sir! Only if she disobeyed! Got it! And, about the Merrow Sapphire?"

"Oh! There will be time to discuss that once my wonderfoo' wittle Pwinceth Wuto is wescued! This is excellent! I was wondering when a capable young fellow would come asking about the Merrow Sapphire! I don't even mind that you're Avalonian!"

Neviah wondered what King Merrow could possibly be talking about, but before she could ask, Lenk forced his way past King Merrow's expansive gluteus maximus, shouting, "Yes, sir! Rescue Princess Merrow, find the jewel, get her back home!"

“And spank her... only if you have to!” King Merrow hung his head at the thought of having to have someone punish his darling daughter.

“Right! Only if I have to!” answered Lenk, ignoring the King as he darted down the ornate arched hallway, toward the hidden sanctum.

The altar to Dag-Gadol was a great, pristine pond, surrounded by high, impassable rock formations on all sides. As Lenk approached the pond, he was surprised as a great fish, larger than any whale, burst from the waters, only to rest its head on the raised wooden dock, just like an expectant, friendly puppy seeking a treat.

Neviah bounced lightly against the back of Lenk’s cap. “Well, go on Lenk! Be polite!”

Not sure if there was a proper way to address a giant, divine fish, Lenk bowed. “Um... Great Dag-Gadol? I seek Princess Lapis! Have you seen her?”

The wood of the dock groaned under the weight of the fish, as it unmistakably shook its head up and down to answer: *Yes!*

Lenk leapt in the air with a hearty “Whoop!” of triumph, before remembering to bow respectfully. “In that case, may I see her?”

With a low, rumbling groan, Dag-Gadol shook its head left and right: *No!*

Annoyed, Lenk snapped his head up, forgetting to be deferential, looking back to Neviah for answers. “Well... then what am I supposed to do?”

“Lenk! Look out!” squeaked the pixie.

While Lenk was looking away, Dag-Gadol had lunged his head forward, his lips slapping wetly against Lenk with such force, the boy was knocked backwards flat on his rear. At the sound of a terrible growl, Lenk grasped the hilt of his sword, only to see Dag-Gadol retreat back into the water and roll onto his side. Lenk realized the grumbling sound was not a roaring battle cry, but was coming from the great fish’s stomach.

Rubbing his bruised tailbone, Lenk stood up and wiped the creature’s slobber from his face. “You’re... hungry?”

Dag-Gadol nodded again with another moaning call like whalesong, but this time, Lenk noticed there was a sad, painful quality to the great fish’s cry. It was no wonder the Merrow venerated it.

Lenk glanced down at a dried, salted Avalonian bass dangling from his supply pouch, which he had intended for his supper. Lord Dag-Gadol was eyeing it hungrily. Lenk dangled the bass by a hook before Dag-Gadol, waving it. Dag-Gadol’s belly gurgled again, but the great fish didn’t make a move.

“Uh... Here fishy, fishy, fishy?” Lenk sang, feeling more stupid with each passing moment.

At the sound of Lenk’s sing-song voice, Dag-Gadol slapped his head against the dock so forcefully, Lenk had to catch himself with his free hand. He felt a blast of hot air that smelled like rotting eggs as the great fish opened its mouth wide, which could easily have swallowed an entire horse from Melonie’s Ranch in one gulp. Lenk gagged, but Dag-Gadol looked down at him with urgent, intelligent eyes.

Neviah fluttered her wings, excitedly. “Oh! Remember the note? ‘I’m trapped inside Lord Dag-Gadol’s belly!’ But how can we… Wait! Lenk? What are you doing?!?”

Before Neviah could react, Lenk leapt forward into the jaws of the great fish. Neviah scurried after him just as the mouth slammed shut, with her pixie light providing the only light source.

Neviah pounded her little fists on Lenk’s cap, with no more force than a kitten. “Lenk, that was crazy! What were you thinking?”

“I was listening to you!” Lenk answered, with perfect sincerity.

Before Neviah could work herself up into proper lecturing mode, sickly yellow lights, each the size of a human head, began to glow around them, in sharp contrast to the red-pink flesh of Dag-Gadol’s mouth and tongue.

Lenk shielded his eyes from the eerie glow. “What are those?”

“Jari-jiri sores! They’re caused by parasites. But… I’ve never seen or heard of any that big?”

“Are they dangerous?”

“Not the sores themselves, but they’re left by an infestation of either jari or jiri burying their eggs in flesh. A regular sized one could give you an electric shock that would sting like a wasp, but ones that size?” Neviah squeaked with disgust and flew under Lenk’s cap to hide. “Um, if you see anything that looks like a flying jellyfish, don’t touch it! You will be electrocuted!”

“Thanks, Neviah!” Lenk grinned as he sheathed his sword and reached for his wooden quarterstaff. Lenk had hired a Cocorico blacksmith to customize his staff for easy carrying. Rather than use a single branch, it had a metal handle at the center with grooves that perfectly fit two smaller staves, perfectly weighted so that it could be wielded from the center or from either end like a traditional quarterstaff.

Lenk took a few practice swings to warm up his arms. “Let’s see if a jiri can electrocute wood!”

Speak of the devil, and he will appear! A large sore at the back of Dag-Gadol’s throat swelled and burst open to reveal a dripping, jelly-fish-like creature, with glowing, blue, translucent skin, and long tendrils that dangled like string.

Not wanting to let the floating monster get its bearings, Lenk slammed it out of the air with the staff, and saw a spark of electricity flash with a snap. Mortally injured, the jiri drifted to the ground with a menacing hiss, unleashing a second charge of electricity as it landed on Dag-Gadol’s quivering tongue.

“Poor Lord Dag-Gadol! He must be in agony!” Lenk thought out loud.

Neviah popped her head out from under Lenk’s hat. “What about us? How are we getting out of here?”

Lenk shrugged as he looked back. “Going back’s not an option. We’ll have to explore deeper and find Princess Lapis. If she’s still alive maybe she knows a way to get Dag-Gadol to open his mouth!”

Neviah grimaced at the sight. “Explore deeper? Just how deep do you plan to go–OOOOOH!”

Before she could finish her interrogation, Lenk leapt down Dag-Gadol's throat, and her last question trailed off in a long wail.

They landed with a soft thump at the base of Dag-Gadol's esophagus, which opened horizontally onto a large cavern with walls lined with thick, wavy flesh: his stomach lining. Below, yellow-green acid hissed softly. Lenk laughed, his heart racing with adrenaline. Hearing Neviah having a fit under his cap, Lenk patted it softly. "Oh, don't fuss, Neviah! We're alive! ... Hello? Is anyone there?"

A delicate voice, answered, seemingly from nowhere. "Well, it's about time someone came to rescue me. You! Who are you?!"

Despite how frail the voice was, Lenk noticed the words had a definite sarcastic edge. It wasn't like any human voice. It had the same thin, wispy sound as the voices of the Merrow fishermen Lenk had met, but much higher-pitched than theirs had been.

Lenk scratched his scalp as he searched for the source of the voice. "I am Lenk, of Nibelung Forest!"

The voice answered with a regal air, as if it were echoing off the walls of Dag-Gadol's stomach. "I am Lapis, Princess of the Merrows."

Lenk peeked carefully over the edge of the esophagus, and found several, naturally-rounded ledges below. Standing on one of these precarious ledges with her back against the wall was a young Merrow girl about Lenk's age. Lenk's first impression was that her head looked like a shark's, but when she turned to look at him, he realized it was an optical illusion. From the front, her pretty face was that of a frail, though rather furious, young woman with fin-like ears. But from behind, her "hair" was like the crest of a hammer-head shark's skull, complete with a second pair of eyes. She literally had eyes on the back of her head!

Lenk grinned and reached a hand down to pull her up. “Ah! There you are, Princess Lapis! I found your letter in a bottle. Your father’s very worried about you!”

Princess Lapis’s eyes went wide, before he huffed and stuck her nose in the air. “What?! Are you saying my father asked you to come here to save me? I’d never ask anyone to do such a thing! ‘Letter in a bottle?’ I have no idea what you’re talking about! My father is worried about me? I don’t care! Anyway, I can’t go home right now. And you...”

Princess Lapis stamped her webbed foot, and barked, “Get out of here!! ... Understand?”

As she stamped her foot, the Princess lost her footing and slipped down the stomach wall a few feet. “Ooooh, Noooooo! Doof!!!”
She landed on her tail on a lower ledge, only a few feet above the steaming, bubbling liquid at the base of the stomach. The Princess picked herself up, rubbing her tail behind her two skirt-like tail fins.

“What a brat!” squeaked Neviah, but Lenk held up a single finger, their hand-signal for complete silence. Lenk gestured to more glowing sores along the wall, with glowing parasites so close to hatching, they were stirring within.

Lenk carefully lowered himself down to the first ledge, hoping he could still reach the fish-girl from there.

Princess Lapis saw him descending, and quickly stopped rubbing her bottom, affecting a commanding, high-handed manner. “Are you still hanging around here? I told you to go away!”

As her voice echoed through the room, Lenk saw some of the sores shiver, as if the creatures within were awakening. He waved a hand desperately to silence the princess. "Shhh! I'm here to help! If you–"

Not accustomed to being silenced by peasant boys, Princess Lapis carried on her tirade. "I'm *okay!* I've been going inside Lord Dag-Gadol's belly since I was little! He loves having someone clean out his teeth, and he actually listens to me! But..."

Oblivious to the trembling sores, Princess Lapis lowered her head, her anger fading. "Lord Dag-Gadol has been very strange recently... Normally he spits me right out if I fall down too deep, but it's like his throat is caught. There are electrified jellyfish and strange holes around..."

At the mention of the jellyfish, Lenk desperately gestured to the nearby wall of sores.

Princess Lapis rolled her eyes. "Oh, of course I know about those! They've been chasing me around Dag-Gadol's throat for days! On top of that my precious stone was... but..."

At the mention of her "precious stone" Princess Lapis slapped her hand over her mouth, before shooting Lenk with a venomous look. "That's none of your business! Anyway... You! Go home now! Understand?!"

Neviah whispered into Lenk's ear. "A precious stone? That's got to be the Merrow Sapphire! You've got to convince her to let us take it to Princess Isolde!"

Lenk grimaced. If the precious stone was the Merrow Sapphire, and if Princess Lapis was worried that Lenk was planning to steal her "precious stone" from her, then her worries were well-founded. Lenk had been privately hoping King Merrow would offer him the stone as a gift for rescuing his daughter, but if it belonged to the Princess, not the King, this complicated his plans.

Lenk lowered a hand to pull up Princess Lapis. “Please, come back with me to your father. If you’ve lost, um, *something*, I can come back myself and find it for you. I promise I’ll bring it right back to you!”

Neviah nestled behind his ear, whispering so quietly, only Lenk could hear. “What are you doing? If you promise her that, we won’t be able to bring back the stone!”

Neviah knew Lenk’s sense of honor meant that his word was his bond. On the one hand, she wished Lenk would just lie and say whatever it took to convince Princess Lapis to give him the stone, but on the other hand, it was her responsibility to act as Lenk’s conscience. She couldn’t in good conscience tell him to go back on his word.

Lenk wiggled his ear to silence Neviah’s interruption.

Unaware of Lenk’s co-conspirator, Princess Lapis fluttered her eyes, moved by Lenk’s chivalrous offer, and held up a delicate hand, as if to let him kiss it. “You’re that worried about me? Then I will give you the honor of carrying me!”

With a grin of triumph, Lenk grasped her by the wrist and prepared to pull her up to his ledge, only for Princess Lapis to pull down on his arm with all her weight. Caught off guard, Lenk slid off the slippery ledge and slapped against the floor of the stomach with a wet slap. He spat out a nasty, stinging goo as he lifted his face from the ground, only to see Princess Lapis looking down on him with an air of command. “However... I won’t leave until I’ve found the thing I’m looking for. You’d better believe me!”

Lenk wiped his mouth, gagging at the taste. “All right. Where did you last see this... important thing?

Princess Lapis looked over Lenk, perhaps sizing him up, before smiling. “I last saw it a week ago when–”

At this news, Neviah had had enough. She flew out of Lenk’s hat and hovered right in front of Princess Lapis’s nose. “You lost it here a *week* ago? But the Merrow said you’d only been missing for a couple of days! Why didn’t you tell your father, or the other Merrows?”

Surprised at the appearance of a furious pixie, Princess Lapis balked. “Well! I assumed if I waited long enough, Lord Dag-Gadol might cough it back up... or... well, then his illness got worse, and he has barely eaten for days! I didn’t know what else to do!”

Neviah stamped a foot in mid-air. “Ugh! You mean you didn’t want to own up to the fact you lost it! I thought this thing was important to you!”

At that, Princess Lapis’s temper flared up. “Hold on, that’s not fair, you... firefly thing! It’s very important to me! It was my mother’s stone–”

Princess Lapis bit her lip and added quickly, “Look, a week ago, while I was feeding him, he suddenly swallowed me! I was so surprised I dropped it inside. I got very upset when Lord Dag-Gadol swallowed it... But I’ve never gone any deeper down Lord Dag-Gadol’s mouth than his uvula until two days ago! That was when the jellyfish appeared, and chased me to the lower throat! I’ve managed to search the throat thoroughly, so I’m pretty sure it’s passed through the stomach into Lord Dag-Gadol’s small intestines.”

Neviah flew furious spirals around Princess Lapis’s head. “Oh, grand, and I expect we’re supposed to hold our breath and swim through his guts?”

Lenk realized it was fun to watch someone else suffer his guardian pixie’s wrath for once.

Princess Lapis shielded her head from the pixie's assault of harmless slaps. "Ouch! Don't you dare lay a hand on me! Look, we don't have to! Can't you see that Lord Dag-Gadol is dangerously dehydrated? His guts will be dry and empty. All Lenk has to do is carry me across the stomach, and I'll get in and out!"

Lenk hesitated at the sight of the bubbling, sizzling liquid pooled at the base of Lord Dag-Gadol's stomach. "But Princess, the stomach acid will eat through me if I try to carry you across."

Lapis scoffed. "Don't be ridiculous. It's not that strong. It will only tickle a little."

Lenk looked to Neviah, quizzically. The pixie examined the ominous pool hesitantly. "Well, if it's ordinary stomach acid, brief exposure wouldn't burn you. But what if Lord Dag-Gadol's digestive system is stronger than a regular person's?"

Princess Lapis waved a hand dismissively. "Bah! I've fed Lord Dag-Gadol for years!" The back of her hand caught Neviah across her tiny backside with enough force to send the pixie flying a few inches off course.

"Hey!" shouted Lenk and Neviah together, as Lenk shielded his pixie companion.

Princess Lapis looked at the pixie with regret. She hadn't meant the gesture to be more than playful. "I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to... I mean, everyone knows stomach acid isn't strong enough to melt through you. Think about it! Why hasn't it eaten a hole right through Lord Dag-Gadol's stomach? And, anyway, we can't go back without my precious stone!"

Lenk swallowed nervously, but looked to Neviah and gave her a silent nod. Nervously, Neviah returned the gesture and returned to her place under Lenk's hat. Silently, the two friends had spoken their agreement. To get the stone, Lenk would have to trust to Princess Lapis's experience.

Taking a seat, Lenk pulled off his leather boots and stuffed them into his knapsack.

Princess Lapis squinted a single eye, as if he was insane. "What on earth are you doing?"

"If my boots get soaked in acid, they'll fall apart in a few days, however weak it is. And they won't provide my feet much protection anyway." Lenk threw the knapsack around his front chest, then bent over, to let Princess Lapis climb onto his back and put her arms around his neck.

As he hoisted her up, wrapping his arms around her legs to support her weight, Princess Lapis let out a cute little, "Yeep!"

As Lenk dipped a toe tentatively into the acid, he didn't feel a sharp pain. To his relief, it only tickled a little.

"See? I told you it wouldn't be that bad," Princess Lapis said, smugly.

Lenk rolled his eyes, and waded briskly into the pool. He guessed that even at the deepest point, it would only reach to his upper chest. As they reached the halfway point, however, he noticed the tickling sensation in his feet had gradually built to a soft burn.

With a surge, he dashed towards the other side, ignoring Princess Lapis's protests as she wrapped her arms tightly around his neck. “What are you doing? Slow down! Slow down, before I fall off!”

Lenk fought for air, feeling the sting spread up his calves and thighs. “Not so tight! I’ve got you, just let me–”

But Princess Lapis wasn’t listening. She embraced Lenk by the neck so tightly, she pulled his weight back, so that her bottom and tail fins dipped into the acid behind them. At the merest touch, Princess Lapis’s eyes popped wide open. “Yeek! It burns! Hurry up! Hurry up!”

As he struggled to keep balance, Lenk felt his grip slipping on Lapis’s right leg.

“Please, don’t drop me!” Lapis wailed, before the acid reached past Lenk’s chest, covering both her legs. As she writhed at the touch, her leg broke free of Lenk’s grasp and her lower torso plunged into the acid.

Reflexively, Lenk closed his eyes and submerged his entire head below the acid, adjusted his grip so that Lapis’s legs rested on top of his shoulders, and lunged upward and onward towards the shore on the other side of the stomach. Still holding his eyes tight, Lenk cupped his hands under Princess Lapis’s hips, right under her lower cheeks, and lifted her up and over his head to physically throw her to safety. She cried out as she sailed through the air, landing face first on the other side, her tail in the air, still sizzling from her brief contact with the acid.

Lenk heard a crackling noise above his head as he scrambled blindly to the shore, sputtering.

Neviah flew into action. “Lenk! The jiri are waking up! They’re after you!”

The moment he tried to squint his eyes open, Lenk felt something wet and sticky slap down against his head, then felt a ringing shock travel through his body. A jiri had attacked his face! Whipping out his elderwood staff, Lenk did the only thing he could think of. He thrust his head forward to submerge the monster into the acid with him, then swung the butt of the staff into the body of the shocked beast to free himself.

Fighting blind, Lenk heard Neviah shout a warning, “More incoming! First one, behind you and to your right!”

Swinging his staff behind him as he waded through the acid, Lenk felt his blow connect against another flying beast. It was getting more shallow! He was nearly there!
“Two more! First one to your left! Second directly above you, coming for your neck!”
Lenk managed to strike the first with a wide arcing swing left, then made a quick gesture to snap the end of the staff against his neck and thrust upward, just before the final jiri could entangle his neck in its tendrils.

As he felt his foot land on the opposite side of the shore, something grabbed his arm and pulled him forward. Lapis’s hazy voice called to him, “I got you, slowpoke! Through here!”

He heard a slurping, puckering sound, felt something wet and fleshy brush against his arms and legs, before collapsing forward onto a spongy floor.

Neviah's voice rang out like an angel's song. "They're retreating! We made it, Lenk! … Oh no! Your eyes! Let me heal you! Oh, Lenk! You poor thing!"

Lenk felt Neviah's pixie dust speckle against his eyes, and risked opening them. He felt the sting of the acid instantly fade around his eyes, and sighed with relief. Then it dawned on him that his eyes were literally the only part of his body that was not burning madly. He dared to take a quick look. His feet and legs were beet red, and the rest of his body was bright pink, from his groin and bottom, all the way up to his chest.

As he felt a second wave of burning, Lenk realized his clothes were soaked with acid. With a roar, he ripped off his tunic and breeches, ignoring Lapis's squeals as she covered her eyes, her cheeks blushing sky blue. "Are you mad? What are you doing?"

He didn't even have the breath to scream. Lenk rested on his hands and knees, trembling as the second wave of fiery burning faded, to be replaced by a new sensation. Back at Nibelung Forest, Lenk had once gotten an angry sunburn on his back from working in the sun too long, and Medo had slapped it teasingly. His entire lower torso, from the tips of his toes to his upper chest, as well as his lower arms, felt precisely like that. His shoulders and face stang too, just not quite at the same level.

Fighting back the pain, Lenk tried to rationally assess the damage. His legs still worked, but that didn't lessen his desire to scream any less.

He heard Neviah chime in. "Thank goodness. It's mostly superficial. The burns will heal on their own… in a few days."

"... Thank you, Neviah," Lenk answered politely, refusing to take his rage out on anyone who didn't deserve it. At this precise moment, a sharp, shrill female Merrow voice interrupted his thought process. "Would you *please* put some clothes on? You are in the presence of a maiden!"

Lenk blinked and turned to find Princess Lapis rubbing her own legs and bottom with one hand, while failing to cover both her eyes behind her other hand.

Lenk examined his pack, not for clothes, but hoping he still had a healing potion from Castle Town. Neviah's magic was useful in life-threatening situations, but it was a precious resource, and could do little for run-of-the-mill burns.

"Neviah? Where are we? Are we still in the stomach?"

"I think this is the opening to the small intestines. Her royal highness pulled you through some gross-looking door. Ugh! It keeps pulsing open and closed!"

Lenk looked back, and sure enough, the door was a circular wad of muscle that opened up to the stomach. Lenk caught a glimpse of the lake of stomach acid through it before it pressed closed again.

Lapis sniffed, glowering at Neviah. "It's not a door! It's Lord Dag-Gadol's pyloric sphincter! Don't you know anything?"

Neviah went back into attack mode, buzzing around Lapis's head like a hornet. "Oh! Of course! How silly of me to refer to Lord Dag-Gadol's pyloric sphincter as a 'door'! Of

course, when you think about it, this 'floor' and 'ceiling' are really just the folds of the intestinal lining, so why don't we all just walk on the ceiling?!?"

Lenk ignored the noisy women as he dug through his supplies. To his relief he had two red healing potions, and the acid hadn't soaked his belongings. Pulling out a rag, Lenk wiped away the last drops of acid, before offering Lapis both a rag and a bottle of healing potion.

"Put! Some! Clothes! On!" she squeaked, snatching the rag and sponging furiously at her bottom, which seemed to have had the longest exposure to the acid.

Wishing he had an entire bath of healing potion to bathe in, he concentrated the potion he had on his feet and legs, which had suffered the most damage. The angry red faded to a bright pink and started to sting again.

Wonderful! That meant the healing potion was working just enough to let him feel pain in his legs again! A few days of this, and he'd be fit as a fiddle!

Lenk found a spare set of clothes and put himself back together, thankful he'd thought to save his only pair of boots earlier.

Now that he was finally decent, Princess Lapis flashed a hot glance at him, her cheeks still blushing bright blue (both sets). "How inconsiderate! How could you drop me like that?"

Lenk looked her up and down, hoping she wasn't as badly hurt as he was. At the sight of the vivid blue burns on her legs and bottom, he wondered if Merrow might have thinner skin than Nibelung like himself. "You slipped out of my grasp."

Lapis's eyes met his, and with a grimace, she turned away to hide her bottom from further inspection with annoyance. "If you're a man, act like one! Take responsibility!

Lenk bowed his head. "I'm sorry I dropped you. I'm glad you're safe!"

At the sound of such a sincere apology, Lapis relaxed, then seemed to fall back on her earlier teasing tone. "And what about that business of grasping me by the... by throwing me to the shore like I was a catch of fish for market? What were you thinking?"

Lenk kept firm eye contact until Lapis met his gaze. "I didn't have time to think. I acted. I had to get you out of the acid."

Unable to think of any further argument, Lapis felt her legs shiver at the thought of her close call. She couldn't meet Lenk's stare, and glanced at her scorched behind, suddenly feeling thankful to be alive, burned tail fins or no. "Well, it could have been worse! That was incredible! I can't believe we got past that! I had no idea Lord Dag-Gadol's stomach acid was that powerful!"

As Lapis turned her face back to smile at Lenk, Neviah seemed to appear before her out of thin air. "No idea? That wasn't regular stomach acid! You claimed to know everything about Lord Dag-Gadol!"

Lenk shook his head. “It’s not her fault. I knew it was a risk when I took it. Besides, maybe it’s worse than usual because he’s so dehydrated.” At this, Neviah seemed to cool down and fluttered back toward Lenk.

Lapis raised her eyebrows (or rather, raised the delicate fish scales that she had in place of eyebrows). “Yeah, that makes sense. I knew Jabu Jabu had a strong digestive system, but that was far worse than I expected.”

Neviah zipped right back to stand nose-to-nose to Lapis. “Stronger than you expected? You *knew* Jabu Jabu had a strong digestive system? What’s that supposed to mean?”

Princess Lapis batted her eyelashes and bobbed her head, boastfully. “Well, Dag-Gadol’s been vomiting, so I’ve tried to assess his condition by testing the acidic content of the bile. I knew something was giving him ulcers, I just had no idea of the extent.”

At long last, a hairline crack formed in Lenk’s stoic resolve. “Wait, so, you knew it was worse than usual? And didn’t bother to mention it? You said normal stomach acid shouldn’t be dangerous!”

Lapis pouted, and answered in the tone of a wise teacher explaining something obvious to a particularly dim-witted student. “Which is perfectly true! I knew we were taking a risk, I just… assumed that it wouldn’t be quite that bad!”

Neviah was about to snap back, but Lenk answered first. “You risked my life without knowing the truth? You should have told me!"

Lenk answered so quickly, it surprised the pixie, who was used to Lenk being slow to express himself. She also immediately recognized the tone of Lenk's voice. Soft, controlled, but dangerous, like when he was about to enter a fight.

Unfortunately for Princess Lapis, she didn't know Lenk as well as Neviah did. Because Lenk didn't raise his voice, Lapis didn't detect the suppressed anger behind it.

She was embarrassed to have been caught in her lie, and too stubborn to admit she had done anything wrong. She crossed her arms, "Well, if you're that upset, why don't you go tattle to my father, the King of the Merrow?"

She slapped her behind, teasingly. "Maybe he'll even give me a spanking for fibbing!"

Lapis winced, as she felt a tingling afterburn from the playful swat. Why did she have to be so thin-skinned?

But as she looked into Lenk's eyes, she felt a very different sort of tingling sensation.

She suddenly realized that he meant business.

Lenk stretched his arms, feeling another angry protest from his burns. "No, I am not going to tattle on you, Princess Lapis."

Neviah realized what was about to happen before Lapis did. Not wanting to interrupt, Neviah flitted away, to find a good seat to watch the show.

Lapis exhaled with relief, until she felt Lenk grab her firmly by the wrist with his left hand. Lenk led her farther away from the door to the acid lake (AKA the pyloric

sphincter), so that they rested safely on a ledge. Lapis was about to explain that this ledge was called the “duodenum,” and to demand that Lenk unhand her at once, before Lenk turned around to face her with a look that made her clamp her mouth shut. “Your father already knows about you running away. He’s the one that sent me to find you. I think he knows about you playing in Dag-Gadol’s mouth too, but it was hard to tell. But now I have a pretty good idea why you begged me not to tell your father about this in your letter.”

Lapis’s eyes shot left and right, as if seeking escape. “He… he knows? You showed him my–”

She cleared her throat, trying to look cool. “… I mean, What letter?”

Lenk dropped his knapsack on the floor to act as a cushion, before settling himself neatly on top of it, not releasing his hold on Lapis’s wrist for a moment. “A letter in a bottle that said, ‘Help me. I'm trapped inside Lord Dag-Gadol's belly. Signed: Lapis. PS: Don't tell my father!’ Yes, he knows, and he’s not pleased. Maybe there’s another Lapis trapped in the belly of a giant, divine fish somewhere, who also doesn’t want her father to know about it. All I know is that your father asked me to go looking for you, to get you home safe, and to give you a good spanking for disobeying… if I needed to.”

"Lenk, you can't be serious," she said, her voice wavering, her free hand flying to cover her burned, blue bottom.

With a gentle tug, Lenk guided Lapis forward and down across his lap, pinning her in place with his right hand so that his left hand was free. He made a point of breathing on his palm as if to warm it up, so that Lapis could see.

Straining meekly against Lenk's right arm, and realizing she was at this ferocious boy's mercy, Lapis's mind raced to find any route of escape. "Wait! You're supposed to get me home safe, right? Can't we wait until then? I'm sure that's what Daddy meant!"

It was the best ploy she could think of, but maybe, just maybe, once Lenk got her home, her father would relent and let her off with a scolding. That had been the way things were ever since her mother passed away.

Lenk raised his left hand high. "Don't worry, I *am* going to give you the spanking you have coming, once I get you home safe."

Lapis shivered with relief, and tried to lift herself up off Lenk's lap, only to feel his right hand easily pinning her in place.

Lapis didn't quite feel the first spank. She felt the impact, but the sting didn't register. But she *heard* it echoing through the cavernous walls behind her like a thunderclap, and as she realized what it was, it shocked her into silence. *Then* she felt the sting, as the angry burn across her bottom flared up in protest.

Lenk paused, giving Lapis a moment to consider how much trouble she was in, to let the knowledge fully sink in: that was what *one* good spank felt like. Lapis already felt tears brimming in her eyes.

"But I'm not going to wait until we get home to give you your first spanking, Princess. Your father's instructions were to spank you, if I needed to. You need to learn a lesson right now!"

"Lenk, please! You can't do this!" she cried, looking over her shoulder, to let Lenk see her lip trembling. Using sad, puppy-dog eyes *always* worked on Dad when she was in trouble at home!

As she saw Lenk raise his hand to deliver the second spank, she cried out, "No! I'm a Prin–" But it was too late.

Before she could remind Lenk that she was, indeed, a Princess, the second spank landed, and the Princess of the Merrow finally comprehended her situation. Her high-and-mighty attitude, which worked so well amongst the other Merrows, was no protection here. It hadn't protected her from the dangers in Dag-Gadol's belly, and it wasn't protecting her now as she was draped over the knee.

The lightest of pats would have been enough to send a wave of pain through her scorched derriere, but Lenk's muscles were honed from daily exercise. This time, Lapis was fully aware of the sting of the slap, building upon the throbbing after-shock of the sensitive acid burn.

As Lenk's hand connected with her bottom a third time, Lapis's body tensed at the ferocious impact, and her face contorted as she tried to endure the first *and* second wave of pain rippling across her entire bottom, tail fins, and legs.

Lenk saw his left hand leave a bright, white imprint on her cheeks, before it quickly flushed to a deeper shade of ocean blue. At first sight, Lenk had expected a Merrow's flesh to feel slimy and fishy. Instead, he found that Lapis's bottom was indeed cool and dewy, but also smooth to the touch.

For her part, Lapis found Lenk's hand felt surprisingly warm and rough, compared to her mother's palm. Finally, Lapis understood she was in trouble. But her royal instincts refused to accept what she already knew deep down.

In her heart, Lapis knew she deserved a spanking, and was ready to accept it, maybe pray that Lenk would show her mercy if she showed contrition.

But *Princess* Lapis thought she knew better: *There had to be a way out of this!*

"This isn't fair! So what if you got a few burns? I got burned too, you know!"

Lenk paused, looking down quizzically at Lapis. "Not fair? You're right! I don't want to be unfair to you!"

He fumbled for something in his travel sack underneath him.

Lapis felt a tingle of excitement. When big sad eyes didn't work, using her bossy voice always did the trick! "Yeah... You're in no position to spank me, Avalonian!"

"And you're not in a position to back talk, Princess," Lenk answered sternly, producing a thick wooden hairbrush from his pack. On its back, it bore the Nibelung sigil representing the Wise Elder Tree, hand carved and painted red.

Lapis's eyes widened in horror as she realized what it was for. None of the Merrow had hair, but nevertheless, Queen Merrow had owned a mother-of-pearl hairbrush, a gift from the royal family of Avalon. And while her mother was alive, Princess Lapis's

frequent misbehavior had led to her backside getting well-acquainted with the backside of a sturdy hairbrush.

An insult died on her lips, and she let out a yelp as Lenk paddled her at a quicker pace. Each thud of the hairbrush was much more intense than the earlier slaps of his palm, and she could feel the ripples spreading through her blue bottom like great ocean waves.

Lenk paused the spanking to lecture her, "What did you do wrong, Princess?"

Lapis's mind raced. The sad, doe eyes hadn't worked. Insults hadn't worked. Asserting her authority hadn't worked. *Think, Lapis, think!*

She remembered the last time she had been bent over her mother's knee, how she had apologized profusely, promising that she had learned her lesson, and mother had finally relented.

Trying to hide the mix of pain and fear in her trembling voice, Lapis answered with what she hoped was polite poise. "I'm sorry, Lenk. I shouldn't have run away and put myself in danger. I knew I was disobeying my father by playing in Dag-Gadol's mouth! And I knew I should have told someone when I lost the... lost my mother's gift!"

Lenk considered her apology, his hand still holding the hairbrush threateningly. Lapis knew the fate of her bottom hung in the balance, hoping that her apology would be enough to end the painful lesson she was learning. She felt a couple gentle warning taps against each cheek in turn. Even those were enough to awaken the continual, burning sting.

Fire and heat were relatively strange phenomena to Merrow. When a Merrow mother wanted to give a stern warning to a naughty child, she would threaten to “Set your tail aflame!”

When she was very young, Lapis had once ignored her mother’s warning to not touch the flaming candles while they were visiting the court of Avalon. By burning her finger, the little Princess discovered the meaning of the word “fire,” and when she went crying to her mother with a burned finger, she had learned the meaning of the word again over her mother’s knee.

The memory of that candle flame was sharp in Lapis’s mind as she felt each gentle tap of the hairbrush.

“Princess Lapis. Answer me truthfully. Do you think your father would be satisfied with the spanking I just gave you as a punishment for disobeying him?”

As two fresh tears glistened against her cheeks, Princess Lapis smiled coyly. This was her chance to end her ordeal!

"Yes, I'm sure he will be very happy with the job you've done punishing me. I've learned my lesson about running away."

It was true! Father never liked seeing his Princess spanked. Sure, the Queen might have carried on for quite a bit longer in Lenk’s situation, but Princess Lapis wasn’t lying!

Lenk smiled. "Very good."

Just as Lapis breathed a sigh of relief, he caught her off guard by spanking her with the hairbrush again, this time across both her lower cheeks, where the acid burn was most severe.

"I have punished you enough for running away, just like your father asked me to. But now I'm going to spank you again for being rude, and for lying to me about the acid, until you are really, truly sorry."

Lenk spanked her left and right cheek in quick succession. Just as the meaning of Lenk's words started to sink in, Lapis felt the hairbrush sink into her flesh. She could actually make out the impression of the carved image on the back. And then the burn flared up.

That did it. Suddenly, Lapis remembered what it was to be a child over her mother's knee again. All thoughts of her position as Princess slowly burned away. Across Lenk's lap, Lapis was nothing more than a naughty little girl.

As Lenk delivered the next ten strokes, she cried, she roared, she pleaded, but in response Lenk slowed the pace with the hairbrush, which only gave her time to feel each smack leave a lingering burn.

She had been unable to hold back tears since the very beginning, but Lapis had managed to resist the urge to break down entirely. As she felt her resolve beginning to crumble, Lapis finally remembered the one thing she hadn't tried: apologizing like she meant it.

"But... I am sorry! Really, I am!"

Lenk checked his next blow with the hairbrush mid swing, so that the brush popped softly against its target (which was still more than enough to awaken the burns). “Oh? That’s a good start, Lapis. In that case, hold this for me, and don’t drop it.”

Lapis looked curiously at the hairbrush as Lenk lowered it before her face and helped her close her fingers around the handle. “Huh? Why are you giving me this?”

“In case I need it later. If you’re really sorry, then you’ll hand it back to me when I ask for it.”

Lapis gulped, and gripped the hairbrush tightly with both hands, afraid of what would happen if she let it drop.

Lenk adjusted his position, so that Lapis’s lower torso was resting on his right leg, her waist held under his right arm. He tested the new angle by patting her bottom with his left hand almost affectionately. “Say, these tail fins, do you ever get spanked on them?”

Lapis looked back over her shoulder. From this angle, her face was resting against the soft fabric of Lenk’s supply pack, and she could just make out Lenk’s left palm patting her tail fins curiously. Lapis shivered at the memory of this exact same sight over Queen Merrow’s knee. “Well, when I was really naughty, Mother used to spank me on my fins, legs and bottom with her hand, then she’d lift my fins up across my back and finish with the hairbrush across just my bottom.”

“Did she? Well, sounds like she does a thorough job! I’d like to meet her. Maybe she could give me a few tips!”

Lapis's eyes welled up with fresh tears, the pain in her bottom forgotten. "You... you can't meet her... She's... she's gone now!"

Lenk scratched his blond scalp. "Is she missing too?"

Neviah buried her face into her palms. Every time Lenk opened his mouth, he found a way to put his foot in it.

In her annoyance, Lapis's tears evaporated as she barked, "She's dead, you idiot!"

Lenk blushed at his mistake. "Oh! I'm so sorry, Princess Lapis! I didn't know!"

There was an awkward silence.

Lapis suddenly became aware of her strange position. Here she was, deep in the bowels of Lord Dag-Gadol's belly, bent over the knee of a stubborn peasant boy from the outside world, who was apologizing to her with stupid, sweet sincerity, as if he was the one in trouble. "Sigh... I forgive you, Lenk."

Lenk examined his surroundings. "You know, on second thought, maybe this should wait until we get you home."

Lapis refused to move from her position across Lenk's right knee. "Oh, no you don't! You're useless! You said you had to do this on behalf of my father? Well, my mother always used to spank me on Father's behalf, and no way would she quit in the middle of something! If you're a man, finish what you start!"

Lenk felt lost. “But… your mother wasn’t a man, was she?”

Above them, Neviah was bent over in fits of suppressed giggles. Lapis was finally starting to grow on her!

Lapis pursed her lips, half-amused, half-annoyed. “Of course not! But if she were here, that’s precisely what she’d tell you!”

Lenk nodded. “Oh! In that case, Princess Lapis, would you say your mother would spank you with her hand, and the hairbrush, for how you acted today?”

The fish-girl froze, having a moment of dawning comprehension as she realized precisely where this was going. A moment ago, she had felt so much smarter than Lenk. Yet, here was the inescapable hairbrush, right in her hands. She remembered his words about how she would prove to him that she was really sorry by handing it back to him when asked. “Y-yes?”

Lenk patted her tail fins again, trying to find his lost rhythm. “In that case, I will try my best to act as if Queen Merrow were here watching me. Are you ready, Princess Lapis?”

Lapis sniffled. “Yes… sir!” She added the honorific, remembering her mother’s instructions to always answer politely while in this position.

With a smile, Lenk began again, concentrating his slaps on Lapis’s tailfins. If her all-too-human bottom was like a pillow, the tailfins were like two supple blankets. He slapped each slowly, until they blushed from white to a sapphire blue color, then folded them aside gently, as if drawing the curtains back to reveal a glistening, pale blue moon.

As she felt Lenk brushing aside her tailfins, Lapis gently lifted her bottom so that he could tuck them under her waist, before settling down again.
Lenk was impressed by Lapis's resolve. His first impression had been that she was a crybaby and a brat, but now she was showing him a new side of herself, which was oddly both submissive and courageous.

However, Lenk was also determined to not let her up until Lapis had shed fresh tears of remorse. He was kicking himself for asking such stupid questions, and emboldened by the challenge to surpass the high bar set by Lapis's mother.

Lenk examined his target. Sure enough, the blue burn marks left by the acid looked painful, but he saw the sides of her cheeks were paler, thanks to the protection her tail fins had provided against both the acid and Lenk's palm. Lenk decided to even out the color, until every inch of Lapis's backside matched the sapphire blue of her burns, and landed a downward clap on the far side of Lapis's left cheek to begin.

Lapis clenched her teeth to hold back her protests as her tears returned. She felt no less foolish than Lenk, and was no less eager to prove her resolve, but she felt an added burden: shame. The slow, steady pace of the spanking had given her time to think about everything, and the fresh sensation of the spanks landing on the sides of her cheeks and thighs felt like her punishment was beginning again all over from the beginning.

The center of her bottom, which had suffered the most damage from both burns and blows, was now steadily aching... throbbing! She felt her anger rising again, felt the desire to shout out curses and cutting remarks. Another part of her was tempted to cry crocodile tears and appeal to his mercy.

She just wanted this spanking to be over already!

But, in her mind's eye, Lapis had a vision. There were three versions of her on different paths, and she could choose her path. She could choose *not* to act like a brat. She could choose *not* to act like a princess. She could choose to speak from her heart. She wept freely, as she cried, "Please! Forgive me, Lenk! I'll be... I'll be a *good girl!*"

Lenk delivered one final spank to the center of her bottom before pausing. "I forgive you, Lapis. Now, hand me the hairbrush."

Lapis's eyes fluttered open, and the hairbrush in her hands appeared to be hidden behind a misty waterfall of her own tears. Sobbing, she lifted the hairbrush up over her head, obediently offering it to her disciplinarian. The binocular hammerhead shark eyes on the back of her head gave her excellent peripheral vision. As she broke down crying freely, burying her face in her own hands, she saw what no child except a Merrow could ever see: a crystal clear view of her own bottom as Lenk raised the hairbrush high and brought it down again and again, leaving welts that blossomed like a field of blue violets.

Like amphibians, the Merrow stored extra water in their skin to keep themselves hydrated out of water. Long after a normal child would have cried out all her tears, Lapis's tears flowed freely like two waterfalls. She writhed, squirmed, trembled, kicked her feet, but she didn't cover her bottom or flee. She saw, heard, and felt each and every one of the ten final whacks Lenk delivered.

After Lenk silently counted out the tenth spank with the hairbrush, he took pity on Lapis. Her apology had been sincere, and whether or not Queen Merrow would have

agreed with Lenk, he decided that Lapis had been spanked more than enough. "All right. I can tell you're really sorry by the sound of your voice. Now, there's one more thing I need to give you."

Lapis looked up nervously, and whimpered, "Is it... another spanking?"

Lenk lifted her up and turned her around gently so that she sat on his lap, and gave her a warm hug, before pulling away and patting her back. "There there, Princess Lapis. It's all over."

As she felt her sit spots lower onto Lenk's lap, Lapis squeaked and hopped in place slightly, before wrapping her arms around Lenk's shoulders to support her weight and letting her scorched bottom hang slightly above and over the edge of his lap. "I... I think Mama would be satisfied with that!"

Suddenly becoming aware of how babyish she felt, Lapis blushed and stood up, breaking free of Lenk's embrace. "Well! Now what are you going to do?"

Having thoroughly enjoyed her show, Neviah returned to Lenk's side. "Are we taking Princess Lapis home now?"

Lenk examined their surroundings. "We've come this far, we should try to find the Zor–uh, Lapis's precious stone. Maybe we can figure out what's causing Lord Dag-Gadol's illness."

Lapis sniffed to hide a tear, then pretended to be entirely unaffected by her tender, tingling tuchas. “Finally, you speak some sense! And don’t you go getting any ideas about snatching it from me! You seem awfully interested in my mother’s stone!”

Lenk held a hand to his heart. “You have my word. I would never steal it from you.”

Neviah groaned. Her boy was such an earnest idiot, it made her proud to be his pixie.

Eager to act, Lenk grasped Lapis’s hand and marched ahead at a brisk pace, dragging her behind him. “C’mon, Princess!”

Lapis’s eyes went wide, but as she rubbed her bottom with her free hand, her mouth curled into a silly smile. “Oh! Won’t you please carry me? ... I mean, don’t just drag me around! I’m not a toy on a string!”

Neviah raised her voice. “Do you want another spanking? Try to keep moving!”

But before Neviah could finish, Lenk halted, and lightly scooped Lapis up into his arms.

Neviah’s wings twitched. “Lenk, you don’t have to let her boss you around!”

Lenk shrugged, completely oblivious to how Lapis was looking away from him bashfully, blushing madly. “She asked nicely. Plus, I can move faster this way!”

Finally, Lapis was able to meet Lenk’s eye. “Lenk... are you still going to spank me again after you get me home safely?”

Lenk knitted his brow, as if the answer should have been obvious. “Yes, Princess.”

Lapis felt a prickle of excitement, one that matched the prickle along her legs and tail. “... Oh! Of course!”

She wrapped her arms around Lenk’s shoulders for support again, before adding, gruffly. “Promise you won’t forget? I expect you to keep your word!”

Lenk raised his eyebrows. “Well, if I forget, would you remind me?”

“Hummph! Imagine forgetting something that important! Are you a man of your word, or not?”

Lenk beamed. “I’ll honor my word. I promise I won’t forget!”

Lapis nuzzled her head into Lenk’s chest, remembering words her mother told her long ago, when she passed the Merrow Sapphire down to her. “This stone represents the heart of our people. Your father gave it to me as an engagement present. Never offer it to a man, unless it’s to a man you can respect, a man who will honor his word... and please don’t lose it, or I’ll spank you!”

Lapis inhaled, taking in the strange, salty scent of the wild, Avalonian boy. Finally, here was a man of his word!

[End of Chapter I]

Beauty in the Belly of the Beast

Chapter II: A Sacred Vow

On their shared quest to find Princess Lapis's precious stone, Lenk and Lapis had a heart-racing and heartwarming series of adventures. After the two friends were ambushed and separated by a monstrous Bigocto rampaging inside Lord Dag-Gadol's intestines, Lenk began to suspect dark magic just might be afoot. Lenk circled through poor Lord Dag-Gadol's small intestine until he found the source: a repulsive, tentacled gelatinous monster, which Neviah recognized as a jarinade, the source of the infestation.

Seeing that the beast had Princess Lapis in its clutches, Lenk gallantly charged into action. Unfortunately, he was unable to touch it with his sword without getting electrocuted. Lenk thought he was a goner until Lapis revealed she also held something in her own clutches. A boomerang?

"Really! The things you find down here. Good thing Lord Dag-Gadol's such a glutton," roared Lapis, as Lenk desperately avoided the monster's attacks, using the boomerang to attack it from a distance.

After defeating the abomination, they recovered Lapis's precious stone, which was indeed the mystical Merrow Sapphire. ("Surprise, surprise!" added Neviah, sardonically.)

Thankfully, the power of the magic stone teleported them out of Lord Dag-Gadol's guts without the need to finish their tour of the divine fish's digestive tract, splashing them both down in the water of the lake.

Their adventure at an end, Princess Lapis yawned, as if they had finished an ordinary walk through the park as a first date, then swam towards Lenk to look him straight in the eye, rocking with her hands clasped behind her back. “You! You looked cool... Cooler than I thought you would, anyway... Just a little! Well, anyway, you saved me, so I guess I'll reward you. What do you wish? Just tell me...”

Lenk gestured to the glittering jewel, three sapphires set in a gold frame. “I want that Spirit Stone.”

Lapis felt her stomach flip a somersault. “You mean the Stone of Water, don't you? My mother gave it to me and said I should give it only to the man who will be my husband. You might call it the Merrow's Engagement Ring! All right! I'll give you my most precious possession... the Merrow's Sapphire!”

“... Engagement ring?” asked Neviah, but too late. Lenk eagerly accepted the jewel and held it aloft, triumphantly.

Lapis winked and climbed out of the water. “Don’t tell my father...” Then, she skipped ahead of Lenk, humming a sweet ditty to herself.

Neviah waited until Lapis was out of earshot, then turned to Lenk. “Lenk... do you know what an engagement ring is?”

Lenk put away the stone, his goofy grin vanishing. “Huh? I didn’t really know what she was talking about, but I’ve finally collected all three Spiritual Stones! My quest to help Princess Isolde defeat Madoc is almost over!”

Neviah sighed.

Lenk raised an eyebrow. “Don’t worry, Neviah! I know it’s Princess Lapis’s most precious possession. Once Isolde has finished using it, I’ll return Lapis’s ‘engagement ring’ safe and sound!”

Neviah didn’t respond. Lenk suddenly wondered if he was missing something.

“Uh… Neviah? Should I know what an engagement ring is?”

Neviah bounced off his hat playfully once before flying ahead of him. “There will be plenty of time for that later.”

Hopefully when you’re a few years older, thought Neviah.

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Lenk and Neviah dashed through the hallway back to King Merrow’s palace, to find King Merrow’s massive backside sealing the exit. They could hear his voice muffled from behind the archway. “I see. So you *did* disobey after all. I’m very disappointed, Princess Lapis! What would your mother say?”

Lenk scratched his head. “Uh, Your Highness? Would you let us pass, please?”

“Hmm? Oh! Our hero has arrived! One moment, my boy! One moment! *Muweep! Muuhweeep!!!*”

Neviah silently fumed as she heard King Merrow grunt and start to inch his bulk away from the exit, not sure whether she was more annoyed with the architect or with the corpulent king himself. “Say, who designed this palace?”

“*Muweep!* Oh? I designed most of it myself! Most Merrow don’t put much stock in paper, but I’m a mean draughtsman when I’m out of the water! Isn’t the latticework simply lovely?”

Neviah watched the King’s rear end squeeze a few inches across the lovely latticework of the archway. “Stunning! Perfect! You’re a regular fish out of water!”

“Why thank you!” King Merrow chuckled as a crack of light appeared in the doorway, allowing just enough light in to illuminate the crack between his two magnificent butt cheeks, which still obstructed nine-tenths of the archway. Lenk held his breath and squeezed past the King’s hips roughly, finally back in the Merrow Domain.

A much more pleasant sight greeted him on the other side of the archway. Princess Lapis stood on the raised stone dais before her father’s throne, her hands held demurely in front of her, clutching a small, white object Lenk couldn’t make out. Around the dais, it seemed the entire population of Merrow had gathered. Perhaps they had come to hear news of Lapis’s rescue, and stayed to listen to her full confession.

At the sight of Lenk appearing from behind her father, Lapis stiffened, before hanging her head. “Lenk? You’re here! I was just telling Papa about everything that happened… and I do mean everything!”

At the sight of her father pointing a dainty webbed finger, Lapis sighed and spun around on the dais to face her people. “Everyone, I am sorry for all the trouble and worry I have caused you. I did not take proper responsibility for the Spiritual Stone of Water. I hid the truth from you all. I ran away. I deliberately disobeyed my father, and… played inside Lord Dag-Gadol’s mouth again!”

The adult Merrow clicked their tongues and shook their heads, and some of the children gasped at the mention of playing inside Lord Dag-Gadol’s mouth.

Lapis’s shoulders shook as she continued her formal apology. “And if it were not for this brave Avalonian, I would most surely have perished. I also failed to show him proper courtesy.”

Lenk was about to interrupt and explain that he was a Nibelung, not an Avalonian, before Neviah bounced up and down on his head and shushed him.

Forgetting her stately composure, the Princess glanced down at the glistening, blue-violet marks on her tail, a public testament to the penalty she had paid for her impoliteness.

King Merrow considered the sight of his penitent, chastised daughter. “Well, it seems Lenk carried out my request, and thoroughly! Very well, Princess Lapis… go to your room!”

Lapis turned around to face her father again. “No, Papa!”

The audience murmured, and King Merrow fidgeted. “Um… please obey?” He never knew what to do in these situations without his better half, the dearly departed Queen Merrow.

Lapis looked to Lenk, silently urging him to approach her on the dais, before casting her eyes down in shame again. “I will obey you, Papa, but first I must atone. The punishment Lenk gave me in Lord Dag-Gadol’s belly was brought on by my own stubbornness. He promised that he would punish me when we got home safe, and I promised to accept my fate. On behalf of the Merrow, I must honor that promise.”

She glanced furtively behind her to the parents and children gathered at the foot of the stone steps, all her subjects. “And the people of the Merrow Domain, young and old, must see that their Princess is not above the law.”

King Merrow sighed with relief, then settled back comfortably. “Ah! Of course! Carry on, Lenk, my boy!”

As Lenk ascended the stone steps to meet Lapis at the top of the dais, she turned to face him again, and held out the small, white object in her hand: an ornate mother-of-pearl hairbrush. “This belonged to my mother. I think you can guess what she used it for. I want you to use it now.”

Neviah poked her head from under Lenk’s hat to whisper, “Lenk, are you really going to–”

But Lenk held up a finger to signal silence to Neviah, casually tucking his hat back in place as he accepted the brush from Lapis. Lenk felt his throat catch. What on earth was

he supposed to say in this situation? He had almost forgotten the promise to spank Lapis again, and was considering sparing her. Even at his most furious moments, he'd imagined this scene unfolding someplace secluded, never imagining a crowd of witnesses.

Princess Lapis didn't wait, and meekly assumed the position, resting her webbed hands on her knees. Lenk saw a few children deliberately scamper around the dais to get a better view of Lapis's behind. Lenk saw Lapis's eyes dampen and her cheeks blush as she took in the scene before her: an entire crowd, her people, there to witness her public flogging.

Lenk felt those same eyes following him as he wrapped his right arm around Lapis's waist to hold her weight. She was trembling. He tried his best to hold her gently, hoping she'd be able to sense from his touch that he wasn't angry with her.

As he held the brush high, Lenk felt he had to say something to help Lapis face this. His habit of keeping silent just wouldn't do. "Everyone? I want you to know Princess Lapis was also very brave. Without her, I probably would have died. I know what she did before today was wrong, but none of you should be ashamed of how your Princess acted today."

At this, the children murmured, and a few of the stern-faced adults cracked a smile, waving their fins in what Lenk hoped was a friendly gesture. Lenk ignored the murmured comments of the crowd below and whispered to Lapis, so that only she could hear. "That includes you, Princess."

Lenk felt her trembling relax, and a smile flashed across her face before she hid it behind mock annoyance. “Well, are you going to keep me in suspense all day? The entirety of Merrow Domain is waiting for you! Get on with it!”

Lenk nodded, and patted Lapis’s already scorched backside with the flat-end of the pearl hairbrush. He realized that though it was smaller than his own hand-carved wooden brush, its material was solid and weighty. Every stroke would cover a smaller, more concentrated area, and he wondered if it would leave bruises.

Lenk swallowed. On the one hand, after all the formal ceremony, he didn’t want any of the Merrow to think he was letting Lapis off lightly. On the other hand, he already felt sorry for her. How would he even tell if he was hitting too hard? The azure ass of a Merrow was hard to compare to the peachy posterior of an Avalonian or a Nibelung.

The first smack rang out, echoing above the heads of the crowd. Lenk saw a mottled, purple mark rise on the spot where the brush had landed across Lapis’s left sit spot. Lenk could only hope that Merrow didn’t bruise more easily than humans.

Lenk settled on a compromise. He would withhold his full strength, but carry out a longer punishment, waiting to listen for cues from both the crowd and Lapis herself to decide when she had been punished enough. He lightened the force of the blows, but made sure to cover every inch of Lapis’s behind and upper thighs. By this time, the color of Lapis’s royal rump had deepened to a vivid royal blue. Lenk felt her struggle to keep still, and felt the weight of her belly press against the fingers of his right hand for support. She was struggling valiantly, but the lingering effects of the burns must have been agonizing.

Lenk paused, hoping this would be deemed a just penalty for her crimes, or to at least offer her a breather. “Princess Lapis, stand and face your father.”

Lapis obeyed, fresh tears spilling freely, sparkling as they caught the cool light. Behind them, Lenk heard a crowd of adult voices muttering what he hoped was approval, even some childish voices cooing with admiration. King Merrow lowered his hand from his eyes, apparently struggling to witness the sight of his spoiled little girl in distress. “Very good! Well, I was never much of a disciplinarian, but I really do suppose her mother would have been very pleased with the job you’ve done, young man! And very pleased with you! This is a happy day for the Merrow!”

Finally, the crowd of expectant Merrow raised their voices in a warbling war cry, their musical voices more used to speaking underwater. With a rush of relief, Lenk offered the hairbrush back to Lapis, only for her to close his fingers around the handle. “No, silly. You keep it of course. You’ll surely have a need for it again in the future!”

Neviah wished Lenk could have seen the puzzled look on his face. “But I already own a hairbrush?”

Lapis rolled her eyes, then kissed him lightly on the cheek, wrapping her right arm lightly atop his left arm as they descended the stone steps. “Well, then keep it as a token of my gratitude. The next time you have to spank me, I’d prefer you use Mother’s brush, though I suppose you can pull out that unwieldy club you call a hairbrush if I’m being a handful.”

Lenk smiled as the adult Merrow clapped him on the back, and wondered why some of the teenage girl Merrows were giggling so absurdly. “Spank you? When am I ever going to have to spank you again?”

Lapis giggled and squeezed Lenk’s arm gently. “That’s very sweet of you to say, but I think we both know I’m the stubborn type! But for your sake, I’ll promise to be on my best behavior… for a while!”

Lenk nodded absentmindedly, struggling to listen to Lapis over the sound of the crowded Merrow’s strange words of encouragement, and whispered comments:

“Good work, lad. Our Princess finally found a man, man enough to tame her!”

“My, he’s so handsome. Just imagine! Our own little Avalonian prince!”

An adorable little Merrow girl bounced up and down before them. “I hope I find a Merrow-mate as brave as you one day, Avalonian! Will you have lots and lots of kids when you get married?”

Lenk laughed bashfully. “Well, I’m a Nibelung actually. I suppose I haven’t thought about that other stuff much. I guess it’d be nice to grow up and maybe have kids one day. But I’ve got to complete Princess Isolde’s quest first!”

Instantly, a hush fell over the crowd. Lenk felt Lapis’s grip tighten on his arm again, but this time she pinched so tightly he felt his arm numb. She turned slowly to face him. “Princess Isolde? You know her, do you? What’s your relationship to her?”

She smiled so sweetly, it made Lenk nervous. Was there some tension between the two kingdoms he was unaware of? Lenk wished he wasn't so ignorant of Avalonian and Merrow customs. "She's sent me on an important quest to gather the three spiritual stones. That's why I sought out the Merrow Domain in the first place. The fate of all Avalon rests on my shoulders!"

"And is that the only reason you accepted my mother's stone? Didn't you want it as a gift from me?"

Neviah gasped and tried to fly to Lenk's ear, but too late!

Lenk grasped Lapis by both shoulders, answering urgently. "Oh no, it was a wonderful gift! You have my eternal thanks. And as soon as I help Princess Isolde stop Madoc Dracomere from doing... whatever it is he's planning to do, I'll come right back to you!"

At this, the crowd seemed to nod approvingly and return to their celebrations. They had started hanging decorations and scattering flowers before him and Lapis. Lenk wondered if these peculiar Merrow customs were just to celebrate Lapis's rescue? It almost seemed like they were preparing for some kind of strange holiday.

Princess Lapis nodded, apparently relieved, before planting a kiss on Lenk's cheek. "Well, I know Princess Isolde well. She is a good friend, and a model of wisdom. I doubt she'll try to steal something so precious to me! ... I hope my mother's stone will help you on your quest... Tee hee!"

Lenk beamed, and embraced Lapis tightly, happy to have made such a good friend. Lapis blushed madly, before shoving Lenk away from her playfully and crossing her arms. “Not in front of everybody, you goose!”

Lenk nodded so wildly, Neviah bounced back and forth inside his cap, unable to catch his attention. He waved to Lapis as he dashed toward the waterfall that hid the entrance to the Merrow Domain. “Okay. Bye, Lapis!”

This goodbye was much sooner than Lapis expected. Her pretend annoyance vanished. She held up a hand in a delicate goodbye, before dropping all pretense and rushing after Lenk to see him off at the waterfall. “Don’t keep me waiting for too long! We’ll have the wedding ceremony at the next full moon!”

Lenk paused at the waterfall. “A ceremony? Huh. It won’t be long and boring, will it?”

After being jostled around inside Lenk’s hat, Neviah practically dove towards his ear. Everything was happening so fast! “Wait, Lenk! Hey! Listen!”

Lapis shook her head. “No. It will be short and sweet… and beautiful!”

Neviah paused. She watched Lapis tenderly place a hand on Lenk’s cheek, before pulling him into a rough half-hug, half-chokehold. Neviah knew instantly that Lapis was trying to make up for pushing away Lenk’s earlier embrace. Trying to make a memory that would last.

Oblivious, Lenk returned the embrace genuinely. Lapis’s rough grip on him melted as she sank into his arms.

Neviah felt the urgent warning die on her lips. Whatever her faults, Lapis deserved to have this moment. Neviah would have to break the news to Lenk another time.

Lenk beamed. “I will return to you as soon as I can, Princess Lapis!”

[The End]

Nisha Finally Gets Her Comeuppance

Chapter I: The Imp and the Wolf

Lenk had been trapped in the form of a wolf for weeks now, his voice reduced to only fierce growls. As he darted through the forest on all fours, his heightened senses of smell and hearing taking in more than he ever imagined, he remembered when he first awoke in the wizard Van Sandt's prison, awaiting his fate, when he was suddenly freed by a small, mischievous imp named Nisha. She wielded dark magic and seemed to take pleasure in teasing Lenk about his curse.

He remembered her taunting words as they made their escape, "You're quite the beast now, aren't you? Ha! Don't worry, I won't abandon you like your human so-called friends have." Lenk couldn't speak a word in reply, but he could feel the shame and frustration welling up inside him.

With no other ally in the world, Lenk had followed Nisha's guidance since that day. Nisha seemed to take pleasure in leading him around the countryside on a wild goose chase, taunting him all the while. "Come on, doggie! Giddyap!" she would laugh, sitting on his back and slapping his haunch as if he were her horse. Once, he had snarled and thrust forward with such tremendous speed, Nisha had lifted off his back. As he felt her seat smack down against him with an audible bump, Nisha only let out a soft, "Oh!" of surprise. Glancing back, Lenk saw her clinging to his fur tightly to hold on, a look of stung pride on her face. It was Lenk's only little triumph for weeks. She smacked his haunch, he'd found a way to smack hers, even without his hands.

His instincts as a wolf were sharp, but he couldn't help but feel a sense of loss at his inability to communicate with human beings. The long days of foraging in the country and skirting the edges of Castle Down had finally paid off. Nisha had caught wind of rumors of a magical blade that could break Van Sandt's black magic.

Sniffing the air to detect Shadowfell, the monsters created by poor souls enslaved by Van Sandt's dark magic, he could smell the faint scent of Nisha's dark magic and hear the soft rustle of her long hair, which glowed with a magical inner light. He couldn't help but wonder if Nisha was serious about finding a way to free him, or if she was simply toying with him for her own amusement.

As they finally reached their destination, a ruined, stone temple shrouded in mist, Nisha finally addressed Lenk's curse. "So, you're unhappy as a wolf now? Hmm, I might be able to help you... but what's in it for me, I wonder?" Lenk's heart sank at the thought of being at the mercy of someone who seemed to enjoy his misfortune.

Fading in and out of the shadows around him, she popped her head up directly out of the ground in front of him. Well, not the ground itself, but rather the shadow he cast on the ground. "What do you say, dog? I help you find a magic little trinket, help you walk on two legs again, and then you help me find another magic little trinket I've been searching for?"

Bowing his head, Lenk could only bark, and shake his head in a silent nod. "I promise," he thought.

With the magical power of levitation and her ability to move through shadows, Nisha was perfectly capable of keeping up with his pace. Nevertheless, she settled down on his back, delivering a sharp kick to his sides. "Come on, slowpoke! You're supposed to be the hero!" she taunted, but despite her cruel words, Lenk sensed that she was leading him to where he needed to go.

Finally, they arrived within the walls of the temple, the ruins of an ancient civilization long since forgotten. Nisha dismounted and looked at Lenk with a newfound respect. "You know, for a dirty, flea-bitten animal, you're not half bad," she said, still teasing but with a hint of genuine admiration in her voice.

They searched the temple, Nisha barking at him whenever she encountered a trap or obstacle, Lenk forced to use tooth, claw, and raw strength to navigate the ruins, until they finally found the sacred grove they were seeking: the inner sanctum. Resting in a stone pedestal lay what appeared to be an ancient sword, overgrown with vines, but Lenk could sense a faint light emanating from it.

Touching his nose to it, Lenk felt the curse lifting. He could feel himself transforming back into his human form. Nisha watched him intently, her expression unreadable.

Grasping the hilt of the sword and pulling it lightly from the stone, Lenk turned to her, feeling a mix of relief and gratitude. "Thank you, Nisha," he said. "I couldn't have done it without you."

Ignoring his gratitude, Nisha stared intently at the shining blade. “The sword accepted you as its master…”

Feeling a bit stupid, Lenk glanced down at the weapon. He had drawn it so easily, it hadn’t dawned on him that this was supposed to be a powerful relic.

When he looked up, Nisha was holding a dark, ornate crystal to his face. “This thing is the embodiment of the evil magic that Van Sandt cast on you. It’s definitely different from our tribe’s shadow magic.”

Reflexively, Lenk reached out with his free hand to take the crystal and examine it. So this was the source of his woes?

“Careful!” snapped Nisha, slapping the back of his wrist as if she caught him stealing sweets from a jar. “If you touch it, you’ll turn back into a beast!”

Sheathing the magnificent blade, Lenk rubbed the sting away from his right wrist. "What should we do with it?"

"This thing is too dangerous. It's probably best if we just leave it here, huh?
But on the other hand... if we kept it, you'd be able to transform into a beast any time you wanted."

Lenk's ears pricked up at that. "I don't want to ever be a wolf again!"

Nisha narrowed her orange eyes, ruefully. "Oh, don't be so small minded. You can't tell me you didn't enjoy the rush? You won't miss the strength, the speed? You must see how useful this could be!"

Lenk struggled to find an argument, even a word in reply. Failing that, he kept his silence. He didn't like trying to talk if he had nothing worth saying.

Sensing that she had won, Nisha balanced the crystal gently on her finger, like a child's toy. "Yes, since Van Sandt was kind enough to give this to us, we should be thankful and use it all we can! If you need it, just call me. I want to keep a low profile, so I'll hide in your shadow when you're human, but I can change you whenever I want."

"You mean whenever *I* want," Lenk finally shot back, coldly.

"Just as I said!" giggled Nisha, with a wordless shrug that seemed to say, "Silly me!" But Lenk noticed her expressive eyes were focused. She'd said exactly what she'd meant to say.

That was Nisha's way. Her words, her thoughts, her glances. It was as though she was saying three different things at any given moment, and you were a fool to not know

which she meant. “You can be a wolf anytime you like! Also, thanks to this thing, you can use my shadow warp magic whenever you want by switching to wolf form.”

She slipped into the shadows, and appeared again behind his shoulder. “Hey, but listen, Lenk… I’ve got a favor to ask.”

Spiraling the crystal in the air near her hand, so that its light reflected in both of their eyes, she glanced up at him like she was asking her papa to buy her a special toy. “Would you mind coming with me to find something called the Gloaming Glass? It’s a magical black mirror, hidden somewhere in Avalon. Yes, the Gloaming Glass… our last potential Lenk to Van Sandt.”

Lenk met her gaze but kept the crystal in his peripheral vision. It was just close enough that he had to pay attention to it, but not quite close enough to be in danger of touching him. “That’s what you were talking about earlier? Your magic little trinket?”

She winked. “Clever boy! You remembered! And here I thought you didn’t retain your human memory as a wolf. You seemed so dense at times, I supposed your mind was slipping. Or is that normal for you? But yes, you’ll help me collect my little trinket, that is if you don’t want to have to worry about ever turning into a wolf again!”

Lenk felt a hot flash of fury, exactly the sense he felt as a wolf when hunted by Shadowfell. “There is no need to threaten me, Nisha. I promised to help you, and I will. I’m a man of my word.”

Nisha darted back away from him, her minxish smile replaced by the look of a frightened little girl. She blinked, and with a shake of her hair, tried to regain her composure and growl, “I don’t make threats, wolf boy. It was a promise. I didn’t help you out of sympathy. I need you, and you’re going to repay your obligation to me. That’s that.”

Lenk narrowed his eyes. "Is that all it was to you? Just a means to an end?"

Nisha's smile faded, and her eyes flickered with a hint of guilt. "Well, maybe not just that. You were... kind of fun to tease, I guess." She looked down at the ground. Lenk wondered if he had been too hard on her. He reached out a hand to place on her head. Just as he was about to thank her for the help she had given him, Nisha slipped into his shadow again. “Then again, it was much more fun teasing you as a wolf. I think I’d like a pony ride now!”

The hairs on the back of his neck stood up. Raising his left hand, he grasped the hilt of the sword and started to draw it. Nisha appeared in his peripheral vision, the crystal aimed at his eye, when—

Sunlight blazed from behind his head. He had to shut his eyes tight against it, and even then the world was a painful red glow. When he opened his eyes, he found it was not the sun. It was the sword strapped to his back. The holy light dimmed, and when he looked down, he found his attacker laying at his feet.

Lenk's face darkened. But as he looked at Nisha, he noticed that something was different. Her skin was glowing faintly, and its color was different. It took Lenk a second to figure out precisely what was different about it. It was black and white before, and it was white and black now. That was the same wasn’t it? No, of course! It was inverted.

“Typical!” she spat. “A protection spell. You Men of Avalon are all the same. No appreciation for the subtle distinction between sorcery and shadow magic! Just blast everything with holy light!”

“Are you hurt?” Lenked asked, with concern.

She scowled. “If I was, it’d be your fault, Avalonian!” She examined her glowing body, which slowly faded back to its original color pattern. “Thank the goddess. It must be a simple warding spell. I’m returning back to normal already. Speaking of which…” she scrambled to find the dropped crystal. Snatching it up from the grass, she turned back to Lenk with the speed of a cat. “Let’s see what we can do about turning you back to your true form, wolf boy!” Nisha leapt lightly into the air, preparing to levitate with her shadow magic. Before Lenk could think, he had already drawn his sword and leapt back into a fighting stance.

But then, the oddest thing happened. She rose about a foot into the air, a look of wicked triumph on her face, which changed to a look of confusion. For a fraction of a second that felt like an eternity, she hung in midair, then flopped forward, face first, onto the dew-covered grass and moss that coated the stony floors of the temple ruins.

SLAP!

An actual cloud of dust rose into the air from the impact. As it dissipated, Nisha swore in a language Lenk didn’t know, but recognized as her native tongue. “*Mudora!* My flight? No matter, I’ll just…” she pressed her hands against the ground, then started slapping the stone and the moss in a frenzy. “No! No, no no!!!”

Lenk instantly understood. Her shadow magic, which had once allowed her to move undetected in the darkness, was now gone. She wasn’t slapping the stone. She was trying to slip into the darkness.

She stood up and shook her head, her orange pony tail slapping against her face. “My hair! I can’t manipulate it! Curse Ava! May Esh, Ahavah, and Chavvah all sit on a golden triangle!”

“Do you think it’s permanent?” Lenk asked, cautiously. This seemed like a stroke of good luck, but then again, Nisha wasn’t going to be much help to him like this.

She stamped her feet and tugged on her hair, but it still danced lifelessly, without its inner glow. “How am I supposed to know, idiot! It’s not my magic!”

As Lenk approached her, he couldn't help but remember all the times she had teased and kicked him while he was trapped as a wolf. He stood before her, his eyes fixed on hers, and asked, "Well, now you know how it feels to be powerless. Do you remember all the times you treated me like a dog?"

Nisha snorted and rolled her eyes. "Oh please, you're not seriously going to bring that up again, are you? I was just having a bit of fun."

Lenk's eyes narrowed as he took a step closer. "Fun? You think it was fun to treat me like an animal? To kick me and tease me when I couldn't even defend myself?"

Nisha crossed her arms and glared at him. "You're being ridiculous. It was just a game. And besides, you were just a stupid wolf. What did you expect from me? Courtly manners?"

Lenk felt his temper rising, but he took a deep breath and tried to stay calm. "I expected you to treat me with some respect. To understand that I was still me, even though I was trapped in that form. But instead, you treated me like a plaything. And now that I'm free, I can see that you've lost something that was important to you. Maybe it's a sign that you should think about the way you treat others."

Nisha huffed and looked away. "I don't need your lectures, hero. And I certainly don't need your forgiveness. I did what I had to do to survive, and I don't regret it."

Lenk shook his head and turned to leave. As he walked away, he couldn't help but feel a twinge of sadness. He had hoped that Nisha would understand how much her actions had hurt him, but it seemed that she was still as stubborn and selfish as ever. As he walked away, he wondered if there was anything he could do to make her see the error of her ways. But for now, all he could do was hope that she would eventually come around.

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Lenk's heart felt heavy as he walked ahead of Nisha, still lost in thought about their conversation. He couldn't help but feel a sense of sadness that their friendship had been strained by her behavior. Well, maybe “friendship” wasn’t the right word. “Relationship?” “Partnership?” Maybe there was no word in Avalonian to describe whatever this was, Lenk mused.

As he walked, memories flooded back to him of his childhood in Odhrán Village, where he had been raised by his adopted father Russel. Lenk remembered how Russel had punished him when he had broken several pots as a prank to show off for the other kids. The punishment had been harsh, but Lenk had never forgotten the lesson. “Odd,” Lenk wondered. “What made me remember that?”

As he walked, he heard the sound of Nisha struggling to keep up with him. She was still without her shadow magic, and it was clear that she was having a hard time keeping pace with him. "I can't believe I'm stuck here like a mortal without any of my powers," she complained bitterly.

Lenk stopped for a moment to catch his breath, and Nisha immediately barked at him with a snarl, “I demand that you carry me this instant!"

"You'll have to learn to walk on your own two feet like the rest of us."

Nisha scowled at him. "I'll have you know, I don't take orders from anyone, especially not a mere human like you."

Lenk rolled his eyes at her. "Fine, suit yourself. But I'm not going to carry you any longer. You'll have to keep up."

Nisha crossed her arms pouting, refusing to move. "I refuse to walk. It's beneath me."

"I'm not your dog," he said firmly. "You need to start showing me some respect."

Nisha scoffed. "Respect? Oh, and what are you going to do about it, hero? Spank me like a naughty child? You're just a foolish little boy with a sword. You're lucky I even bother to keep you around."

Lenk felt his blood start to boil. How could she be so disrespectful after all they had been through together? He knew what he had to do.

Lenk's face hardened. "Nisha," he said sternly, "I think it's time I teach you a lesson."

Nisha laughed. "You're going to teach me a lesson? You couldn't even catch a fish without my help."

Lenk ignored her and sat down on a nearby stump. "Come here," he said, motioning for her to approach.

Nisha hesitated, but eventually walked over to him. “The idiot wants to sit and chat. Fine. I’ll play along and as he’s prattling on, I’ll pull the crystal from my hair and—"

Without hesitation, he grabbed Nisha by the arm and pulled her over his lap.

Nisha's eyes widened in shock as he raised his left hand and brought it down hard on her backside.

WHAP!

Nisha tensed her whole body in a state of absolute shock. It didn't really hurt that much, actually. Well, she wasn't sure if it hurt or not. She just couldn't believe that that had just happened. "No. He didn't just spank me. That's impossible!"

As Nisha was pondering this philosophical question, Lenk rubbed his hand gingerly across her backside, which was surprisingly soft to the touch. Russel's wife Ulrike had taught him that this was a good way to "make sure they're awake and paying attention" before beginning to spank in earnest. Deciding Nisha was most definitely awake, Lenk drew his hand back and delivered a second sharp smack, the sound echoing through the temple.

Nisha gasped, surprised at the sting of Lenk's hand on her behind. She turned her head to glare at Lenk, but he was staring at her firmly, waiting for her to fully grasp her situation.

"H-how dare you!" Nisha exclaimed indignantly, struggling to get up.

Lenk pushed down on her back, his strong hands holding her in place. Nisha could feel his muscles tensing as he prepared to deliver the punishment.

He spanked her twice, alternating his smacks between her left and right cheeks with two, great, sweeping motions of his arm.

As Lenk's hand came down on her bottom, Nisha let out a gasp. The impact sent a shiver through her body, and she felt the sting of his entire hand and 5 splayed fingers.

She couldn’t see the damage, but could imagine a near perfect imprint of his large left hand on her left butt cheek. She gritted her teeth and tried to hold back any sound.

Lenk's hand landed on her bottom again, not quite as forcefully as before, but the sting still intensified. Nisha squirmed and kicked her legs, trying to escape, but Lenk's grip was too strong.

"You deserve this," Lenk said firmly, his voice low and stern. "You need to learn to treat me with respect. It wasn’t my fault that the sword held some kind of protective magic. You were the one who probably activated it when you tried to backstab me.”

Nisha bit her lip, desperately holding back a retort. His words stung her pride, because she found a part of herself agreed with him. She’d been furious with herself for the past hour. But it was easier to be furious with Lenk instead. “You call that a spanking? You spank like a grandmother.”

“Thank you,” answered Lenk, with four more of the crisp, steady strokes. “I know some grandmothers back in Odhrán Village and that’s a high compliment.”

Nisha snorted at this wisecrack. She was surprised that a strong, silent type like him could be as quick with his words as he was on his feet. She chuckled as she felt her buttocks bounce and jiggle under the last few spanks. This wasn’t that bad, she thought. She could tough this out. But then another thought struck her. This wasn’t how hard Lenk could hit. She knew that well enough from feeling the full force of the first four trembling blows. So why was he going easy on her now? So that she could listen to him lecture her? But that meant...

Nisha’s snickers of laughter died in her throat. She turned her neck and was able to see Lenk in a new light. It wasn’t going easy on her out of weakness. It was... practiced.

“Mine is not the first bottom this man has spanked?” Nisha thought, with a twinge of horror.

Keeping up his steady rhythm, Lenk thought back to Russel’s wise words. “Picking up a stick and waving your arm around doesn’t make you a sword fighter, kid. There’s an art to these things. With the sword, you had to learn timing, precision… Grace. It’s like a dance.”

“I guess sword fighting is a lot like spanking,” Ulrike had teased them as she watched them spar. Lenk had learned the wisdom of those words on both the receiving and the giving end of a spanking. You couldn’t just wave your arm wildly up and down, and expect good results.

Angling his left arm down, Lenk aimed a hard spank at the bottom of Nisha’s left cheek, right where it connected to her upper thigh. “The sit spot,” it was called. Just a couple there. He preferred to save that area for the end, as a sort of *coup de grâce*. As the name implied, it was the part of Nisha’s bottom she would be sitting on, or rather would avoid sitting on, for a good while. But not quite yet, thought Lenk. Just a warning of things to come.

As Lenk’s hand landed on her sit spot, Nisha felt her torso rise up and forward slightly, less than a centimeter. As opposed to bringing the force downward, Lenk had used the lower angle of this last spank to change the pace. It didn’t have the same resounding force, but it covered more surface area. Nisha actually sensed the friction of palm against buttock, like a stinging itch a moment after being scratched. And just before Nisha had time to feel the sting not fade away immediately, Lenk landed a second identical spank to her right sit spot.

In no particular rush, Lenk returned to the old, softer pace, leaving Nisha to reflect on her situation. As her thoughts turned inward. She thought about all the times she had

teased and belittled Lenk while he was a wolf. She had never thought about how her actions might have hurt him. Now, as she felt the sting of his hand on her bottom, she thought of how she had slapped him on the haunch to make him giddy-up.

With two claps, Lenk kept the steady rhythm but increased the force, somehow managing to let his hand linger on her bottom for a fraction of a second without missing a beat.

Nisha flinched at the impact, but only let out a small hum as she held in the roar of fury she wanted to let out. Her bottom was a light pink hue after only a few swats, but Lenk knew that wasn't enough to teach her a lesson.

"Ow! Lenk, that hurts!" Nisha protested, twisting on his lap.

"Good, it's supposed to," Lenk replied sternly, continuing the spanking.

Nisha continued to squirm and protest, but her resistance only fueled Lenk's determination to punish her properly. His hand connected with her bottom at a quicker tempo, each smack making her skin turn a shade redder.

Nisha struggled to maintain her tough façade. He could feel her tense up as he began to spank her with more strength, but she quickly tried to cover up her discomfort with sarcasm.

"Well, well, well. Look who's the big tough hero now, spanking little old me," Nisha sneered.

Lenk gritted his teeth and aimed one of the “low angle pitches” square at the center of her backside, nearly covering both cheeks. Then he changed to a less predictable pattern. Quick smacks, hard smacks, little changes here and there. Lenk thought of the steps of a

lively dance he once shared with Irya, as opposed to the slow, predictable waltz favored by the visitors from Castle Town. Now, Nisha was his dance partner. His hand and her backside seemed to be dancing to the beat of their own drum.

As he delivered each firm smack, Nisha's taunts became more and more angry.

"You think you're so high and mighty, don't you?" she spat. "You wouldn't even be here if it weren't for me. You owe me, and you're just taking out your frustrations on me!"

Lenk paused the punishment and looked sternly at Nisha. "I owe you nothing, Nisha. I didn't want to help you because I thought I was your slave. I wanted to help you because I thought you were my friend. But then you act like you're my enemy. Sure, you may have helped me break the curse, but that doesn't give you the right to treat me like a dog."

Nisha huffed and crossed her arms. "Fine. Just finish this stupid punishment so we can get on with it."

Lenk nodded and resumed the spanking, considering whether he had gone too far. Nisha didn't talk much about herself, but he had listened to every word she said during the long weeks, and her sense of pride was unquestionable. She might seek revenge on him later for spanking her like a little misbehaving brat. But then he remembered all the times Nisha had teased and kicked him while he was trapped as a wolf, and he knew that she needed to learn a lesson.

Nisha finally started letting out a yelp with each swat, the sound actually sending some nearby birds flying in panic through the rustling branches of the trees. She tried to push herself up again, but Lenk held her firmly in place, each blow of his hand landing harder than the last.

As the punishment went on, Nisha's behind began to turn a bright shade of red, and she winced and let out a hiss.

"Stop it, Lenk!" Nisha roared, her voice cracking.

Lenk paused for a moment, his hand still resting on her hot, cherry-red rear end.

"Do you understand why I'm doing this?" Lenk asked sternly.

Nisha huffed and nodded her head. "Because I've been an ass," she growled.
Lenk nodded in satisfaction and helped Nisha up. She rubbed her sore backside, flinching at the pain.

"Now, I want you to go find a switch," Lenk said, pointing to a nearby tree. "We're not finished yet."

Nisha froze. He couldn't be serious! "Lenk, please stop, you can't do this to me! I'm a..." She stopped herself before she admitted too much. "I mean. I'm sorry?" Nisha begged, deliberately trying to make her voice crack with emotion. A little of the wounded puppy dog routine couldn't hurt, right?

Lenk paused and looked at her sternly. "You're not sorry yet," he said. "Now go and fetch your
switch. Make sure it's sturdy."

Nisha glared at Lenk, but knew better than to argue. Reluctantly, she trudged over to the nearby grove, still rubbing her glowing red booty furiously. She flashed a hot glance at him, but as he met her gaze he noticed that her fury seemed to melt.

Blinking back a tear, she looked at him almost, coyly? It was the same look she used to give him while teasing him for being trapped as a wolf. With a start, Nisha turned her face away, clearly more embarrassed by her tear than her rear. Lenk found the gesture oddly cute, surprised at the strangeness of the thought.

As Nisha disappeared into the trees, marching like an obedient soldier, Lenk couldn't help but reflect on the situation. He wasn't sure that he wanted to forgive Nisha for the way she had treated him, but he also knew that he couldn't just leave her behind. She was a part of his journey now, and he was determined to see it through to the end. At the same time, he found that he had a strange respect for her. In a way, it would have been easier if she was completely terrible. Her strength and cleverness made her awful words all the more cutting.

He remembered how Russel and the other parents had asked him to help punish the children of Odhrán Village occasionally. Turo, Muro, Bess, even Conner. They'd all found themselves over the lap of "Big Brother Lenk" on at least one occasion. There was one especially memorable incident where Turo had led them into the Forever Forest. When their parents discovered their absence and all the village joined the search party, Lenk had been the one to find the lost children, crying in the woods. Later, after returning safely home, they were crying for a different reason when Lenk spanked each in turn before sending them home to await their parents' return. Until the day Lenk left Odhrán Village, the parents of Odhrán found that a threat to send a naughty child to Lenk for a punishment tended to encourage perfect behavior.

Russel had taught him that the purpose of spanking was to help a child grow into a good person. Forgiveness was required for a proper spanking. Lenk thought darkly that he would have to work on the forgiveness part for Nisha.

[End of Chapter I]

Nisha Finally Gets Her Comeuppance

Chapter II: The Princess and the Knight

Trying to ignore the sting in her tender bottom, Nisha hopped to reach high enough to pull down a strong-looking branch. With a flick of her magic hair, she broke it off with a sharp snap. “The effects of that warding spell must finally be wearing off,” she thought. Testing to see if she could hide in the shadows, she found she could not. “It must have a longer effect on my more complicated shadow magic,” realized Nisha. But with her hair, would that be enough for a surprise attack? Nisha held the switch in her hand, feeling its weight and strong bark. She wasn’t afraid of Lenk hurting her, but he was definitely capable. Turning him into a wolf was her best chance to resume control over the situation. “What if he finishes this little disciplinary session and decides to leave me here?” she wondered. But no, Lenk was the simple, good-hearted sort. She was planning intrigues against someone who would probably die rather than break his word to her.

A thought occurred to Nisha. She told herself she wasn’t afraid of Lenk, but was that entirely true? Was she lying to herself, in the way she hid the truth from Lenk these past few weeks with her carefully chosen hints and teasing? In one way, she couldn’t be afraid of such a kind soul. But was she really not afraid of him hurting her? A chill breeze brushed against the stinging warmth of a red, hand shaped mark on her bottom. What if she attacked him without holding back? Could she overpower him? What if she backed him into a corner? Would he draw his sword on her? Kill her? Was she willing to risk that just to avoid a little spanking and a blow to her pride? So much was at risk, more than Lenk could possibly imagine.

In the end, it was really just a question of whether she wanted to go back, face her spanking, and trust him to help her, as a free man, or try to force him into servitude for no reason other than because it suited her.

“I’m not a coward,” she said, out loud, and cut the stray twigs off the rod with a flourish of her magic.

Nisha emerged from the woods with a slender birch switch, which she handed to Lenk reluctantly. Lenk examined it carefully, making sure it was the right size and shape for the punishment he had in mind. A bit short, he thought, but strong and supple. “You found a fine switch, Nisha. This will do perfectly.”

He whipped it through the air to test the feel of it in his hand. Nisha stiffened at the sound, just imagining how many times she was about to hear that same “swish” followed by a sharp “crack!” But Lenk didn’t begin the punishment right away, letting the moment hang.
"Nisha," he said, his voice serious. "Why did you treat me that way? Was it just because I was cursed and couldn't speak for myself?"

Nisha looked down, her face a mix of shame and anger. "You don't understand, Lenk. You were just a tool to me, a means to an end. I didn't think of you as a person, just as a way to help me break the curse on my people."

Lenk's expression darkened. "That's not an excuse, Nisha. You could have treated me with some respect, even if you didn't care about me. There was no need to kick and tease me like a dog."

Nisha bristled. "Well, you were a dog, technically!" she protested. "And anyway, it's not like I wasn’t useful to you when you were trapped in your cursed form."

Lenk shook his head. "That doesn't make it okay, Nisha. You hurt me, and you need to take responsibility for that. You can't just brush it off and pretend like it didn't matter."

Nisha looked away, unable to meet Lenk's gaze. She knew he was right, but she didn't want to admit it. She'd always thought of herself as tough and independent. The idea of apologizing and admitting she was wrong felt like a blow to her pride.

But as she stood there, watching Lenk hold the birch switch, she started to feel something else. Regret. Both for what was about to happen to her bottom, but also for what she had done to merit it. She realized that that the hurt she was feeling was the same kind of hurt Lenk must have felt from her kicks.

Finally, she looked back up at Lenk. "I'm sorry, Lenk," she muttered, her voice quiet. "I was wrong to treat you that way. It was cruel and unfair, and I regret it."

Lenk nodded, but he didn't lower the switch. "I accept your apology, Nisha. But I think we still have some unfinished business here."

Nisha's eyes widened in surprise as Lenk gestured for her to turn around. “See that fallen log?” he asked her pointedly. “Go bend over it. I need to use my full arm to use this switch properly.”
"Do we have to do this? Isn’t it enough that I said I’m sorry?" she demanded, her temporary feelings of sorrow suddenly replaced by her old defiance.

Lenk's expression was stern. "Saying you’re sorry isn’t the same as truly being sorry. You're going to take your punishment, Nisha. It's the only way we can put this behind us."

Nisha hesitated, but she knew he was right. Still, she felt the need to turn her head and pout defiantly as she marched toward her doom. She would accept her fate, but she didn’t have to like it.

She bent over the log gingerly, gritting her teeth as Lenk tapped the birch experimentally against her backside. Nisha was painfully aware of how high her bottom was in the air compared to her head. Being bent over Lenk's lap like a child had been embarrassing in its own way. But with her backside still stinging, poking out in the open air of the forest like an offering to the goddesses, Nisha felt a different sensation. Shame. Nisha hadn't felt this ashamed of herself since... well, since leaving her home.

Lenk finally landed the first lash of the birch across her bottom, with a sharp, cracking sound.
Nisha was unhappy to learn that a switch could deliver a more painful and lasting sting than just a hand. As the switch connected with her bottom again, Nisha let out a yelp of pain. It almost felt like it was cutting into her bottom with each thin line, and she struggled to keep still as Lenk continued to deliver the punishment.

Nisha gritted her teeth and told herself to not cry. She was so fixated on fighting back tears, the third stroke caught her off guard. With a yelp, she thrust her hands back to shield her bottom. With no support for her head, she fell face first over the fallen log, her feet dangling in midair.

Lenk checked his next stroke at the last moment. "Hold still, Nisha."

"I am, I am!" Nisha bawled, her voice tinged with frustration as she realized she wasn't holding still at all. A fine picture of composure! She wanted so badly to take her punishment bravely, like a grown up. She wanted Lenk to look at her and see a strong woman, not a trembling child. With the fourth cutting lash of the switch, that hope vanished, as she actually felt a welt raise on her skin as the branch seemed to peel away from her skin in slow motion. After the fifth fresh stroke, she felt her legs kicking uncontrollably.

“Put your feet down,” Lenk ordered. Nisha didn’t listen, kicking up her right foot and throwing back her hands to put anything between her bottom and the terrible birch switch. She felt his hand gently pulling her foot away from her bottom. Then, he brought the switch down, not on her bottom as she anticipated, but on the sole of her right foot. She gasped at this change of events. After two more stinging strokes to the bottom of her right foot, he placed it down on the ground, and for good measure, lifted her left foot so it wouldn’t feel left out.

After landing the first stroke on her left foot, he paused. “See, if you kick your feet, they might catch the blow of the switch. If you disobey again, I’m sending you out to the woods to fetch a whole bundle of switches, and we can start over from the beginning.” He landed the final two strokes to her left foot and set it down firmly on the ground. “Same for your hands,” he added, and taking her right hand by the wrist, delivered 3 strokes to her palm.

For some reason, Nisha found herself shouting with fresh strength at this new predicament. So much of her attention had been focused on her bottom recently, it was as though the rest of her body didn’t exist in some way. As Lenk released her right hand, she pulled it away and blew on it, trying to cool the 3, angry red marks that crisscrossed it. The cool air did nothing except make her palm prickle.

As expected, she felt Lenk grasp her left palm and braced herself, wanting to put up a braver front than she had been. “I’m not afraid of a little spanking,” she thought, ferociously, before Lenk delivered three stripes to her left palm.

When her left hand was released, she obediently put it in front of her, getting it out of range of the switch. She danced a little back and forth, trying to support herself with the soles of her feet and her hands, and finding each stung too much to handle her weight. But she now felt no temptation whatsoever to put them in front of her bottom. “Sorry, butt, you’ll just have to fend for yourself for a while!” Nisha thought with a huff.

Lenk let Nisha shift uncomfortably on her hands and feet for a moment as he tried to collect his thoughts. This wasn't going well. Had he forgotten something? He tried to recall his experiences in Odhrán Village. Muro was well behaved, but on the rare occasions Lenk had punished him, little Muro had acted like a strict professional. Spanking may be an unpleasant business, but Muro treated it with all the seriousness of business. Conner was similar, such a well-behaved kid, and so sensitive, Lenk felt guilty after delivering the first smack. None of his memories with those two seemed useful at the moment.

On the other hand, Turo had been a trouble maker and his parents had frequently found work for Lenk as a "hired hand." Like Nisha, Turo had a tendency to act tough and not give an inch, but at least he knew how to hold still. Bess reminded Lenk of Nisha too, but in a different way. Always a drama queen at heart, Bess tended to cry and bawl before the spanking even began, hoping to convince Lenk to go easy on her. Lenk eventually learned to ignore Bess's crocodile tears until he heard the real thing. Nisha had that same dramatic flair, but was also much tougher than Bess. He had already punished Nisha more harshly than he had ever punished any of the kids of Odhrán. Well, except for Irya. Lenk swallowed a lump in his throat at the memory.

"A good spanking should end in tears," Ulrike had once told him matter-of-factly when he had been on the receiving end. As a babysitter and "hired hand" Lenk had found the wisdom in Ulrike's words. Real tears were a sign that the message had gotten through. They couldn't be faked, even by Bess with her method acting approach to being spanked. He'd caught a glimpse of a couple tears from Nisha, but her force of will when it came to hiding her tears was incredible. The only time Lenk had seen that sort of fortitude was... Irya.

Yes, even sweet, compassionate Irya had been in need of discipline over the years. In fact, it was Irya's father Bo who had started the tradition of making Lenk a "hired hand" for

child discipline in Odhrán. When Irya had visited the Odhrán goats and forgotten to close the gate behind her, the entire flock escaped. After the desperate round up was complete, Irya confessed her guilt to Lenk before speaking even to her father. When he urged her to tell Bo the truth, Irya promised she would if Lenk would come with her. As predicted, Bo was disappointed.

But to Lenk's shock, Bo wasted no time in spanking Irya in front of him, then proposed that Lenk should do the honors of finishing Irya's spanking, as it was his hard work that Irya had destroyed. Lenk initially refused, horrified at the thought of ever hurting a friend like Irya. But Irya argued that if she was going to get another licking in either case, she'd feel less guilty if Lenk would do it. She seemed so sincerely sorry, Lenk couldn't bear the thought of leaving her to face a second spanking alone. Bo guided him through the process of spanking Irya with the same fatherly concern he used to teach Lenk the art of goat herding. And just like Ulrike had taught him, Lenk had spanked Irya to tears. For the following fortnight, Irya had been sent to Lenk for an additional spanking to reinforce the message first thing in the morning, every morning. The tradition was set. Bo talked up Lenk's skill as a "hired hand" around town. Lenk never understood why, until Irya admitted proudly that she'd never cried during one of her father's spankings. Lenk had been the first to accomplish that.

Lenk swallowed at the memories of spanking Irya over the years. Irya and Nisha were certainly not the same when it came to how they accepted the fate of being spanked. Irya was polite, remorseful, compliant, almost helpful in a strange way. But with all that, Irya never cried easily. If only there was a way to convince Nisha to take on Irya's "bend over and accept your fate with dignity" mindset.

At the thought of Nisha, Lenk's thoughts returned to the present moment. He caught a glimpse of Nisha's orange eye looking back at him. He'd been stalling long enough. Giving her a few moments to regain her composure and think about the fresh welts on her hands and feet had been a good idea, but a good spanking should never be boring.

Lenk met Nisha's curious glance with a knowing grin. Embarrassed to be caught staring, she snapped her head forward sullenly. Lenk felt like he'd solved a particularly tricky puzzle. He had expected Nisha to just accept her spanking and learn from it, but what she needed to learn first was how to learn from a spanking.

"All right, Nisha, that was twice you've disobeyed an order and struggled. How are your hands and feet feeling?"

Nisha blew a wild strand of orange hair from her face with a huff and rolled her eyes. "They hurt. My hands hurt, my feet hurt, my butt hurts. What do you expe—"

TWHIP!

Nisha howled as beautifully as he ever did in wolf form, her cry trailing off into a moan at the end. Just like when using his hand, Lenk found that using a cane or birch required a precise flick of the wrist. A little variety didn't hurt, but by aiming so that the very end of the cane landed on target, he could muster more force and raise a thicker welt. Just like an underhanded grip on a sword, thought Lenk, admiring the effects.

"That's another thing, your attitude. Defiance and rudeness aren't going to help you one bit in this situation, Nisha. You think it's courage, but it's plain stubbornness. Ever seen a mule?"
Nisha flashed her wicked grin and looked back. "I think I've ridden one recently!"
Nisha's impish expression vanished with a look of dawning comprehension. Lenk had moved to her left side, aiming a whistling backhanded stroke so the end of the cane landed squarely on her right cheek, leaving a welt perfectly matching the one on her left.

It turned out the only reply to Nisha's wise crack was the crack of the birch as it snapped in half.

Lenk looked at it for a moment, then tossed it aside with a shrug. “Pity, I wasn’t quite finished. No matter, you will fetch a new switch, and you can expect an additional spanking with Rhiannon’s hairbrush. That should suffice to bring the message home, for today.”

In a panic, Nisha scrambled up off the log and turned to face Lenk, hiding her bottom from sight. “No fair! You said you’d only send me to fetch another switch if I kicked and broke the last one!”

“Actually, I said if you disobeyed again, I would send you to fetch a whole bundle of switches. Thank you for reminding me.”

“But I didn’t disobey! It’s not my fault the switch broke!”

Lenk pointed his finger emphatically, with a forceful gaze that silenced Nisha. “First, it broke because I whipped you with it. I whipped you with it because you back-talked, immediately after I warned you about your attitude. Deliberate defiance is disobedience. Second, I didn’t say you wouldn’t get another spanking if you obeyed, I said you would be fetching that bundle of switches if you disobeyed. I’d already decided to introduce you to the hairbrush from the start, regardless of how you acted during the switching. Third, spanking is a punishment for children. It ends when the naughty child has learned her lesson. That’s you, Nisha, and you haven’t learned a thing yet. I’ve known some kids who could be brats, but they were at least smart enough to shape up when they found themselves bent over a knee, mine or their parents. I’ve never seen someone take a spanking as poorly as you have. Are you that afraid?”

Nisha bared her fangs. “I’m not afraid of anything, let alone anything as childish as a spanking.”

“Then fetching those switches should be no problem, should it?”

Nisha felt like something was caught in her throat. She opened her mouth and closed it again with a pout. Damn it all! Why couldn't she come up with a comeback to that? She should be leading this backwater villager around by the nose.

"Very well, master, I will fetch your bundle of switches, and you can wear out the whole lot of them on my heinie, if it pleases you. But I won't give you the satisfaction of seeing me cry."

"I am not your master, Nisha, I am your ally. Or at least, I want to be. And I take no satisfaction from any of this. I don't want to hurt anybody, ever. You mistreated me. You attacked me, bringing a curse upon yourself. And then you took your frustration out on me. If we're going to be friends—ah, allies—then there has to be an understanding between the two of us."

"So the understanding is, if I don't do anything you like, I get my butt spanked? Some partnership!"

"You have magic, don't you? You have a crystal you can threaten me with. Well, fair enough. If I can trust you not to misuse that crystal, you can trust me to never spank you again. But the fact that I can spank you, well, that's my magic touch, Nisha."

At the mention of her magic, Nisha thought of her hair. She prodded the ground with her foot again, testing to see if she could slip into a shadow. No luck. She caught a glimpse of Lenk's face as he focused on her foot. "Shit! Does he know?"

It was finally Lenk's turn to give her a knowing smile. "Still can't slip into the shadows? Well, at least your hair's magic has been restored. It had its inner glow back when you returned with the switch."

“Well, for someone who’s useless for spotting traps, you don’t seem to miss a thing when it comes to an opponent! Guess that comes in handy as a swordsman… and a wolf!”

“Thank you, it does. And the fact that you came back at all, knowing what would happen, means that you’re not a coward. You could have used that hair of yours to stop this any time. Why didn’t you?”

Nisha bit her bottom lip. “I… I told you I’m not afraid of a spanking. And… I need you.”

Lenk let her answer hang in the air. Nisha felt the discomfort of it. “The strong, silent type act.”

Nisha sighed. “I’ll go cut us some more switches. Will… ten be enough?” Lenk only nodded in reply.

Desperate to at least win a tiny victory, Nisha used her hair’s magic to whisk ten sturdy branches from the nearest trees, cleaning them and presenting them in the wink of an eye. She only wished she had a ribbon to tie them together with a bow.

Lenk examined each in turn and nodded approval. Then he pulled, of all things, a woman’s hair ribbon from his gear and tied them into a neat bundle. “Probably a gift from a pretty flower of a country girl,” fumed Nisha.

Lenk finally broke his stony silence. “Now we’re getting somewhere. All that’s left is to give you some practice at taking your licks.” Nisha approached the log to assume the position, stepping gingerly at the memory of trying to balance her weight on her still-smarting hands and feet.

But before she could lay across it, Lenk stopped her. “Don’t just lie across it. I made a mistake letting you do that last time. You’re not a bump on a log. Stand your feet firmly in front of it, bend over, and press your hands on top of the log to support you.” Nisha gave the appearance of obeying, shifting her feet uncomfortably and floating her hands just above the rough surface of the bark. The welts were screaming in protest.

A gentle tap of Lenk’s birch bundle against the fresh welts on her bottom snapped Nisha’s attention back to Lenk.

“That won’t do. You have to be solid. Think of it as taking a fighting stance.”

“The welts… It hurts too much…”

“Only because you think it hurts too much. The welts are going to hurt no matter what you do. Dancing around on ‘em is probably making it worse. Concentrate on your stance. Your whole body, not the small part that hurts.”

Nisha obeyed, and after a flash of pain from the welts, she found she could indeed push through it. It was as though Lenk was teaching her sword fighting for a moment. Almost… dignified.

“Now lift your head up, and stick out your buttocks.”

Nisha scowled. “And… it’s gone!”

“Eyes forward. Find a point to focus on and keep your attention on it.”

Nisha found a bird’s nest and fixed her eyes on it furiously. “Stupid birds!” she thought.

“Arch your back a little. Think of yourself as a soldier: ‘Present arms!’”

“Ugh! How is this supposed to help me?”

In answer, Lenk tapped the birches against her, not enough to hurt (well, except that the welts hurt at the slightest touch!) But hard enough so that Nisha felt her body rock forward slightly.

“Feel that motion? Now that your stomach’s not pressed against that log, the impact of the birch has to go through you. Your goal is to accept that, but also to resist it.”

“Are you sure you didn’t get spanked on your head as a child?” teased Nisha, before cursing herself for mouthing off again.

Lenk chuckled. “Good one. Since you made me laugh, I won’t give you an additional spanking for talking back.” But he did slap the birches against her playfully, with just a tad more firmness than the previous test stroke.

“Don’t test your luck, Nisha,” they both thought.

“In sword fighting, a stance must be strong, but also flexible. You must be like the rock, and the river. When you feel the birch, it’s going to carry you forward, so you need to resist it to keep me from sending you barrelling over the log again.”

Nisha rolled her eyes, before feeling a third stroke, just a bit harder than the second. This time, she felt the rolling motion and caught herself. As she did, she felt herself press her weight into the birches. “It’s like I have to help you spank me,” she muttered.

Lenk landed a fourth stroke, this time, hard enough to have some sting to it. “Exactly!”

“So, he heard that. Damn those pointy ears of his!” thought Nisha, keeping silent this time.

WHACK!

The fifth stroke was probably at about half his full strength. Nisha sucked in a breath as the welts on both cheeks tingled.

“Don’t forget to relax, Nisha. You can’t keep a muscle tensed for long. Breathe in. Breathe out.”

Nisha scrunched up her face, then let out her breath. She felt at ease.

And with the sixth stroke, she knew it had begun. No longer holding back, Lenk struck with the force of a swordsman. But Nisha was ready. She found her body gracefully accept each stroke, and strangely, found she could mentally accept each one before it landed. But the 12th stroke caught her off guard and sent her forward, catching herself on the log with her elbows. She looked back, terrified that this would merit her another spanking. How many was she up to? But Lenk had mercifully paused.

“Better, Nisha. But you’re relying on predicting the rhythm. You need to move with the opponent.”

“Are you going to teach me to sword fight next? Hopefully you don’t knock me on my ass!”

“It wouldn’t hurt. Or rather, the part about learning to use a sword wouldn’t hurt. Trying to predict an opponent’s rhythm is a losing game. By the time you’ve finished arguing with yourself—”

WHAP!

A surprise spank!

"—they've got you! Try not to think about what your body is doing. Let it move on its own. I want you to concentrate on something else now."

"What, that bird nest on the tree? That's what I picked to focus my attention on."

"Good. Now I want you to close your eyes. Visualize that same bird nest."

Nisha closed her eyes and thought of the nest, complete with birds, but a quick stroke of the birch shook her out of it. "Hey! I wasn't ready!"

"Would you complain to an enemy who was striking you? Accept, and concentrate."

THWACK!

Nisha had a retort come to mind, something to do with stabbing her opponent in the ass while his back was turned, but chose to hold her tongue.

WHAP!

She finally brought up the mental image of the bird's nest again. Lenk seemed to be taking his sweet time. Maybe he was finished?

WHIP!

Birds! Something about birds! Stupid little peckers!

TWHIP! WHUP!

Two in quick succession. Lenk was back into his free form style.

THWAP!

Damn! There was no way for Nisha to predict this.

WHACK!

Birds! Baby birds in a nest!

TWHICK!

Nisha saw the baby birds clearly in her mind.

THWUP!

Over the image, she saw her own body, gliding forward gracefully as the impact of the birches rippled through her.

SMACK!

She'd always loved watching the nightjar take flight, the rolling motion of their wings.

CRACK!

Nisha's eyes snapped open, feeling some of the birches snap across her with the last stroke. As she gazed at the bird's nest, she saw a mother bird returning to it.

Glancing at the nearly spent bundle of switches, Lenk whistled. He was impressed that Nisha was such a quick study in the art of taking a spanking. She was accepting her punishment beautifully.

“Well done, Nisha. Only four of your ten switches have survived. No point using them now, and they may come in handy later. As promised, we will finish by introducing you to Rhiannon’s hairbrush.”

With a quick gesture, he produced a sturdy wooden hairbrush from his pack. Nisha turned to look as Lenk held it in his left hand, and patted it against his right palm. She noticed it was ornately decorated with a carved image of a horse on the back. Somehow, she found that fitting. It was handsome, yet simple. It also seemed fitting that her punishment wasn’t over. Now that she had finally accepted her situation, she felt like everything that came before didn’t count in a fashion. Nisha wanted to be punished properly, and she wanted to show she could take it properly too.

“Lenk, Can you... Please bend me over your lap again. I’m afraid I can’t hold still much longer without your help.” She tried to lift herself up from the log, and felt the welts stretch with a twinge. Without looking, she knew that there must be crisscrossing welts covering most of her lower cheeks.

“You took it bravely, Nisha. You squirmed a bit, but stayed in place. But I don’t think I’ll bend you over my lap this time. I’m going to take you across my knee.”

Nisha scrunched up her face. “Isn’t that the same thing?”

“Not quite. I find this particular position better for aiming a hairbrush. But it’s quicker to show you than it is to explain,” said Lenk, rather pleased at a chance to demonstrate his experience in this area. He sat himself on the same log and set a soft blanket he used for travel across the log to his right. Then he picked Nisha up gently and set her down

facing him on his right knee, guiding her forward so that her upper torso rested on the blanket.

Nisha blushed as she felt her legs spread apart, Lenk's knee providing support to the lower half of her body. Nisha suddenly felt even more exposed than she had been bent over the log, and thanked the goddesses that at least her bottom was facing away from Lenk. The delicate balance made her completely dependent on him to hold her in place. But it was also strangely comfortable, being pressed against the soft blanket and the thick wool of Lenk's trousers.

As Lenk twirled Rhiannon's hairbrush in his left hand with a practiced flourish, he caught it deftly and tapped it a few times against each of Nisha's stinging cheeks. Even those gentle love pats were enough to send an angry stinging sensation through the welts, like the after effects of a sunburn.

Just a moment ago, Nisha had been thinking about how she deserved this. How she wanted what was coming to her. She felt like she had to say something, partially to hold off the onslaught for a few precious seconds, and partially to do something to restore her sense of pride.

"Don't you dare let me off easy," she snapped, with a hint of her teasing voice. "You almost had me crying like a baby before you broke that switch. Couldn't you tell wailing away with it like that wasn't a good idea? You clearly must not have much experience as a disciplinarian."

Nisha felt the bravado fade from her voice even as she tried it. She realized that, with her in this position, Lenk could aim down blows vertically from high above his head. She suddenly had a vision of watching him split a moblin's skull with a similar style of blow with his sword. Plus, with her legs dangling across either side of his thigh, she couldn't

tense up her bottom like she could before. That strange sense of relaxation came over her again.

“You don’t show fear for a second, I’ll give you that,” answered Lenk, impressed.

Wasting no more time, he brought the hairbrush down with a sharp “pop” across her right cheek, right where it connected to her upper thigh. Nisha had no clue what a “sit spot” was, but Lenk had decided it was time to return his attention to the area for the grand finale. “A perfect position on the posterior to place some perfunctory paddling punishment,” Russel had once jested.

The second stroke landed on Nisha’s left sit spot. The stinging was more intense than before, and Nisha cried out louder, no longer able to pretend she was gifted with an invulnerable butt. The third thudding blow sunk deep into her flesh, covering the surface area of most of her lower cheek, and gracing across some of the welts from the birch. The thought of how different this felt from a switch was interrupted by a second wave of stinging pain from the welts, like an angry protest.

Nisha was feeling all the impact rippling through her bottom, combined with the sharp sting that usually only a switch could provide. Lenk was indeed a master at more than the sword.

Nisha had been so close to breaking down completely during the birching, it didn’t take long for the closing argument from the hairbrush to have its desired effect. The tears were back, and instinctively, Nisha still wanted to fight them.

But why? Why did she want to fight the tears? To prove she was strong? She already knew she was strong. But was she really? She had used Lenk. Used his strength as her tool, because deep down, she knew that her bold front wasn't enough.

All her shame and regret welled up in her heart, pouring out of her in waves into her tears, rolling down her cheeks. At the third stinging blow, she shut her eyes tight, the world disappearing into blackness.

All along, she had been just pretending. Her “strength” had been a lie, hiding her fear. Hiding behind Lenk's strength. But now, she had nothing to hide from Lenk anymore. All was laid bare before him. And with each wave of fresh pain she felt this man's strength.

For the first time in her life, she felt like she didn't have to pretend to be strong for someone else. And as Nisha accepted her weakness, accepted the pain, it was as if the fire in her flesh was burning away that weakness.

After the fourth slow, deliberate stroke, Lenk gradually picked up the pace, just like riding Rhiannon from a walk, to a trot, to a canter, to a gallop. By the tenth spank, Lenk had reached the “canter tempo” and concentrated on painting his target a nice, even coat of red-violet.

By this point, it became impossible for Nisha to count any further. The sting of each well-earned blow faded into the next. In her mind, everything faded into a black void, punctured by shining stars. Her bottom. Her poor, poor bottom! The whole of the world had ceased to exist. It was like the eternal darkness of twilight.

With a force of will, she opened her eyes, and the whole world seemed to shine with stars around her, the same stars she had seen in the blackness.

As Nisha caught a glimpse of her tears dripping down, glistening on the grass below her face, she felt a strange new sensation filling her heart. Relief. It was the relief of knowing that she was a bad little girl, and Lenk was punishing her for her behavior exactly like she deserved. She knew that he cared for her, and that he wanted her to be a better person.

Nisha closed her eyes as the tears returned, but this time she didn't fight them. She welcomed them. And with a long, shuddering cry, she wept until all her tears were finally cried out.
"I'm sorry, Lenk," Nisha sobbed, her voice barely a whisper. Then she took a breath and spoke with the commanding voice of a queen. "I am so, so sorry! I shouldn't have teased you like that. I didn't mean to be so mean to you. I just... I don't know how to act sometimes..."

The brush paused as Lenk raised it high above his head, his eyes meeting Nisha's. She winced as she heard her own words, realizing she was still making excuses.

"No, that's not it. All along I knew I was being cruel to you. I... enjoyed it. I'm just a spoiled, naughty little girl! Can you forgive me? You can spank me as much as you want! Please, please forgive me!"

Lenk stopped the punishment and helped Nisha up, holding her as she cried. "It's okay, Nisha," he whispered. "You've learned your lesson." He hesitated before finally adding the words he knew were necessary. "I forgive you."

Nisha was surprised by Lenk's forgiveness, but also grateful. She had expected him to hold a grudge, to go on treating her with the contempt she never failed to show him. She knew that she needed to do better, to be a better friend to Lenk. And with that realization, she vowed to change her ways.

"Thank you, Lenk," she said, wiping away her tears. "I won't forget this, and I promise I'll treat you better in the future."

Lenk nodded, his expression softening. "I know you'll keep your promise, Nisha. I trust you. I never want to have to do that again."

Nisha felt a thrill at the last words. She felt the sincerity in them, but she also understood the implicit meaning. “Idiot,” Nisha thought, but didn’t dare say out loud.

Deciding she couldn’t resist teasing Lenk just a little for this slip, she pushed away from his embrace to look him in the eyes defiantly. “That means you’re willing to do it again if you have to. I wonder if you even thought about that possibility. Gonna’ spank me every time I act out of line, now?”

“I, well, I really don’t want to. I don’t get any pleasure out of it,” stammered Lenk, suddenly realizing with a blush that he’d said something that was the opposite of what he’d meant to say.

“You really don’t, do you? Not one hint of enjoyment? What about all that business with the switch and the hairbrush? You’re really good at this. One day, you’ll make some farm girl a happy woman, and probably keep at least ten children in line with that whole routine... and maybe your wife too,” she hissed with delight, flashing her sharp teeth in a wicked grin.

“What? No, not my wife. I’d never... I mean, it’s a punishment for children.”

“Is that what I am? Is that what you see when you look at me? A child? That punishment was pretty strict for a child, wolf boy. I think that was a punishment fit for a full-grown woman. You sure you wouldn’t enjoy spanking a pretty farm wife, just a little? Maybe if she asked for it?”

Lenk swallowed. He hadn’t wanted to admit it, but the thought that Nisha was not a child had occurred to him before. Her wit, her way with words. At some level, he’d always sensed she must be much older than she appeared. Had that really just slipped his

mind? And, he hadn't enjoyed it, had he? "I... I don't want to hurt anyone. Never. Not you, not the creatures I fight, not anyone, not unless..."

"Not unless it's necessary, right?" finished Nisha.

"Yes," answered Lenk, lamely. It suddenly occurred to him that without Nisha, he might not have made it very far on this quest.

Nisha tilted her head, positively beaming. "Well, if you never want to do it again, I'll just be careful to behave myself so you never have to!"

With a cough, Lenk straightened up stiffly. "Yup! If you ever treat me like a dog again, you'll find yourself back over my knee! But that won't really be a prob--" Nisha silenced him with a commanding wave of her hand.

"Then again, it's not really fair that only you get to decide when a spanking is necessary, is it?"

"What are you suggesting? That you can spank me?"

"Oh, not at all. You're such an innocent farm boy, you're not capable of ever being as naughty as me."

"Well, in the future, if you aren't willing to accept a spanking, then I promise I'll never spank you again."

"You're so slow! That's not what I meant either. What if I think I need a spanking and you're too much of a gentleman to see that I deserve one?"

"Well, what am I supposed to do if that happens?"

"Don't worry, if I ever think that I need a spanking, I promise to ask you for one. Think about it. It'd be much better to have a quick spanking over and done with than to let it build up for months like we did for this one, right?"

"I... I suppose. Wait, are you asking me to spank you again?"

"Are you kidding? After the severe chastisement you just gave me, I won't be able to ride on your back for a week. But if I do ask you for a spanking, at any point in the future, it's only fair that you give me one, right? Maybe a little less severe than this one, but you seem to have a knack for choosing a punishment that suits the crime."

"Okay, Nisha. I don't really understand, but that makes sense. If you ask me for a spanking, I mean, really ask me sincerely, I guess I can give you one if it will help keep you in line."

"Oh, thank goodness. I was worried for a second that I was never going to get spanked again. Well, I'll hold you to that promise, master spanker."

Lenk pondered Nisha's request. Somehow, it felt like there was something off about the whole situation. It was as though Nisha was a queen, matter of factly giving a servant orders, but the order didn't make much sense to him.

"Oh, and by the way, you'll have to carry me. I can barely walk after that brutish beating."

"Oh! Of course, let me help you." Lenk bowed apologetically, and reached to pick up Nisha.

“Oh, hold on, don’t be so eager to take an order. You’re like a puppy! Let me do that right! Ahem!” Nisha cleared her throat and took a step back. Then she curtsied. “My noble knight, would you please grace your lady by carrying her? Your most generous guiding hand of instruction, and your rod of correction, and your masterful skill with the hairbrush, has left your lady with a most chastened and sore derriere.”

With an elegant twirl on one foot, Nisha spun around and bent over with a flourish. With her hands on her knees, she arched her back, oh so slightly, so that her well-spanked behind was presented like a heart container to Lenk.

For the first time, it suddenly dawned on Lenk just how grown up this seemingly childish imp really was. “Very well, my lady, allow me to help you.”

Wrapping his left arm under her hip, he picked her up gently so that she could sit with her arms around his neck and her lower weight supported by his arm.

Nisha winced as she felt the cloth of his tunic press against her sit spots, but before Lenk could apologize, she delicately placed a finger against his lips. “Now, now. It’s good for me to remember my punishment, isn’t it? There’s no changing the past, only learning from it.”
Lenk could think of nothing to say, so he only nodded, with that stubborn strength that was starting to strike Nisha as stupidly sweet. The two of them continued their journey, with a newfound respect and understanding between them.

Nisha’s shadow powers returned that night. “The effects of the protective spell may have been strengthened by that temple. Or maybe that sword of yours knows I’m sorry and has accepted my apology,” she mused out loud. She lifted herself out of Lenk’s embrace and flitted into the shadows.

Lenk found that he was feeling a newfound respect for Nisha. She had taken her punishment without complaint.

Well, not exactly without complaint, but she had certainly taken it heroically. and had even apologized for her behavior. He realized that he had misjudged her before, and that she was more than just a teasing imp.

As they made camp for the night, Nisha sat down next to Lenk and looked up at the stars.
"I've been thinking about what you said," she said. "About how we need to work together to rescue Avalon. You're right. I shouldn't be so selfish."

Lenk smiled at her. "It's alright. We all make mistakes."

Nisha smiled back, and Lenk noticed how pretty she looked when she wasn't scowling. He was beginning to see her in a new light.

"I'll do whatever it takes to help you," Nisha said. "I promise."

Lenk nodded, feeling a sense of relief. He had been worried that things between them would be awkward after the punishment, but it seemed that they were back to being friends again.

As they settled down for the night, Lenk laying on his back on the tall grass and Nisha's head nestled on his chest for a pillow, Nisha couldn't help but think about the punishment she had received. It had been embarrassing and painful, but it had also been a wake-up call. As she felt Lenk's chest rise and fall beneath her head, Nisha realized that she had been taking Lenk for granted, and that he deserved better.

She resolved to treat him with more respect in the future, and to make up for her past behavior. Suddenly, she felt a jolt as Lenk's hand rested on her sore bottom. Nisha started awake, flashing an angry glance at him, only to find Lenk snoring, fast asleep. As the initial twinge of pain faded, Nisha found the warm buzzing strangely comforting. "Idiot, doesn't even know what his hands are holding onto."

She closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep, feeling a sense of peace and contentment that she hadn't felt in a long time.

[The End]

Lenk Meets Lachesis

By Yu May and Gojira

As Lenk finished playing the final notes of the Music of Eternity on his vessel flute, he stepped out of a pool of light into the strange temple of another world. This was it. After discovering the ancient variation on the original melody, Lenk had learned not only to pass through the corridors of time in his own world, but across worlds as well.

The Temple of the Fates was an imposing structure, supported by solid marble columns carved to resemble men and women. It was as if they were in despair as they struggled to hold up the edifice. Lenk felt a shiver travel up his spine. The style was unlike anything he'd ever seen in Avalon. It was ancient, beautiful, but also strangely cold. The despairing faces on the sculptures seemed to look right at him, screaming to warn him against entering.

Lenk drew his old shortsword and elderwood shield, and made his way into the temple. As he wandered through the vast, empty corridors, he looked for monsters and traps around every corner, but the Temple of Fates was eerily empty. Finally, Lenk navigated to a central room. The only floor was a great circular platform, resting on a pillar which rose from the cloudy, grey water. Next to the platform was a heavy battering ram, also hanging from chains, pointing towards a large bell on the opposite side of the chamber. At the center of the room, a gigantic statue depicting the face of a beautiful woman stretched from floor to ceiling.

After examining every corner of the room, Lenk found a lever, and pulled it. Instantly, the pillar swung forward, slamming into the bell with a tremendous, echoing clang. Lenk froze, and felt the air in the room go still around him. Then, the sound of the bell began to slow, but did not quiet, and Lenk saw it too was impossibly frozen. Lenk felt a warm glow from his vessel flute, the one gifted to him by the Princess of Avalon, and

instantly understood. This place was touched by a magic similar to the Temple of Eternity.

As Lenk reached for the vessel flute, time began to flow again, and the bell shook and rang once more. After a few minutes, Lenk had worked out the architect's intention. There were two bells in the room, but only one pillar. This room was a puzzle, a test of strength and wits meant to deter foolish thieves and trespassers. If there were two bells, there had to be a way to ring the second bell, right?

Diving under the water, Lenk found a rusted turntable beneath the central platform. He tugged at it, but it wouldn't budge, before he was forced to come up for air.

Quickly, Lenk swam to shore, grabbed his satchel, and pulled out his equipment from his previous adventures.

With a grimace, Lenk pulled on the golden bracers, and felt their unnatural strength pour into his body. He wished he wasn't trapped in his childish body, before Princess Isolde had sent him back in time and restored his lost youth.

Lenk had to wear a pair of heavy iron boots to reach the watery floor, and strained to move the ancient mechanism. When he emerged from the water, he saw that he had spun the platform, and the battering ram was now aimed at the second bell. After he pulled the lever, the second bell rang like a gong, and Lenk again felt a strange shiver travel up his spine as time froze around him. But again, it faded, and the bell finished ringing its deep, haunting note.

Lenk slammed his fist into his thigh. As he looked at the statue of the beautiful, expressionless woman, she somehow seemed to be mocking him. Her face reminded him of Princess Isolde, but there was none of Isolde's kindness in the statue's empty, white eyes.

After Lenk and Princess Isolde had barely survived their battle with Madoc Dracomere, before the mad King of Evil had become fully possessed by the demonic beast Magog. Isolde had warned him against using the powers of the vessel flute again, except in dire need. But Lenk remembered Magog's final warning, his promise that he would return with vengeance. Lenk had no choice. He had to kill Magog, once and for all.

Suddenly, Lenk had a flash of inspiration. Climbing his way up to the second bell, Lenk used his full strength to ring it. The moment that he felt the air grow still, Lenk grabbed the vessel flute, and played the first note, matching the tone of the great bell. Then, he played the ancient Music of Eternity. The moment he finished the song, the sound of the bell disappeared. It didn't fade naturally. All the sound in the room was gone.

Lenk wanted to cheer with joy, only to find that he couldn't breathe. It was as if the air was thick and heavy all around him. Choking, Lenk tried to rush to the lever that controlled the battering ram, but felt like he was swimming through mid air. The vessel flute burned hot at his side, but Lenk ignored it. As his lungs started screaming for air, Lenk reached the level, and pulled it. Then, he played the vessel flute again, and the world sprang to life. The battering ram slammed into the second bell, and as both bells rang in harmony, Lenk covered his ears. At the center of the room, the statue of the woman began to crack.

Lenk gasped for air, and examined the results of his work. The beautiful woman's face was now marred. As he understood the key to the puzzle, Lenk smiled.

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After the battering ram smashed through the stone face of the woman, Lenk crawled through the rubble and charged down the hidden path behind the statue. The long corridor led to an empty, high-ceilinged room, with three towering mirrors like doors,

each framed ornately with tarnished gold and silver. Lenk recognized it from a drawing in the ancient book where he'd found the alternate melody for the Music of Eternity, which spoke of gods and goddesses as powerful as the goddesses of Avalon, but without love or pity for their people. This was the Throne of Lachesis.

As Lenk approached the central mirror, he saw his own reflection, but it was strangely hazy, and cloaked in shadow. Then, Lenk heard fluttering, and looked up. Above him, a tall, dark-skinned woman with snow white hair swooped down, moving like a hawk coming in for the kill, but much too slowly.

Lenk flinched as she landed lightly in front of him. She was dressed in a toga, decorated with a thin sash, and wore a long, billowing cape of eagle feathers. Her helm was decorated to resemble an eagle with spread wings. The woman spoke in a silky voice that sounded like it came not from her throat but from far away. "We have been expecting you, child of another world. I am Lachesis, Goddess of the Present, of the sisters of fate."

As Lachesis stepped toward him, Lenk noticed that one of her breasts was fully exposed, and bowed his head awkwardly. The woman laughed delicately. "You are polite, for a trespasser."

Lenk raised his head slightly, frowning, but before he could apologize, the woman held up a hand. "No, do not speak. I already know the reason for your coming. Yes... I have always known. It is woven into the tapestry of your fate. You seek the end of a hated enemy."

The woman waved a hand, and a disc of flame and shadow materialized in mid-air. Deep within its depths, Lenk could make out the face of a man, twisted in agony and hatred, screaming silently into the void. Behind the broiling black fire, the man's face seemed to melt and reshape into that of a great beast, like a boar.

Lachesis basked in the glow of the hellish flames. “This man, Madoc Dracomere... is now possessed by the spirit of evil, the demon, Magog. You have sealed his body in a prison, but you have not destroyed his spirit. You fear his return, and the destruction of your world... so you have traveled through space and time, seeking the power held only by myself, and my sisters: the power to weave the threads of fate. I have seen the truth written on your heart, have I not?”

Lenk stood tall, forcing himself to look stern. “Yes.”

There was a sound of a fist slamming against glass. Lenk tensed, and started to draw his sword, looking for the source. To his left, he saw a second mirror, but behind his own reflection, there was the terrible face of another woman, as beautiful as Lachesis, but black as ebony. The raving woman screamed, trapped behind the surface of the mirror, slamming her long-nailed claws against it. The second woman howled, her voice low and guttural. “Sister... little sister... I thirst! Why won’t you heed me? Our sacred temple... our image... desecrated! The one responsible stands before you now! Give him to me! ”

Lachesis held up a hand, and the surface of the second mirror clouded over. “Quiet, Atropos! Forgive my elder sister. She is rather old-fashioned. You might say she lives in the past. It is she who measures out the thread of each man’s life, whether god or mortal, and cuts it short.”

Lenk blinked. “Then... she can help me stop Magog from returning?”

Lachesis shook her head, and glanced at the silent image of the screaming man, before the flames seemed to swallow him, and change his shape to that of a boar again. “I see you do not wish for this creature’s death out of a petty desire for revenge. Rather, it is he who seeks revenge on you, your people, your world. Your goal is noble. However...”

Lachesis bent low, as if to whisper in Lenk's ear, then snatched him by the wrist. "... even if I *could* save your world from destruction, I would not do so, for such is your fate. You see, the weave of fate *cannot* be changed. And I cannot forgive your hubris, little boy..."

Lenk tried to pull his hand free from the woman's iron grip, but she towered over him. With her free hand, Lachesis splayed her fingers, and glimmering, gossamer threads wove through the air, interlacing to form a shape made of pure light. With a final flash, a tall throne appeared in the center of the room. Dragging the boy behind her, Lachesis strode toward the throne and seated herself. "... so, for destroying my statue, I will have to punish you severely..."

With that, she picked Lenk up, and draped him across her lap, bottoms up. Then she flipped up the skirt of his tunic, and roughly tugged down his white breeches, revealing his pale, bare bottom. Lenk gasped as he felt the cool air tickle him from behind. He twisted to look over his shoulder, and saw Lachesis' expressionless face as she raised her arm high. "... With a good, bare bottom spanking, as befits a foolish little boy!"

Lachesis brought down her hand, producing a resounding clap as her palm slammed against Lenk's lower buttocks, covering a good portion of both his cheeks. Lenk roared, and writhed desperately to break free of the amazonian woman's grip, but to no avail.

Lachesis began to spank at a steady rhythm, as if counting out each passing second: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven...

As he realized the spanking was only just beginning, Lenk's yelps of surprise slowly transformed into howls of despair. He tried to kick, but his undergarments caught against his knees.

Without pausing the spanking, Lachesis started to lecture in a motherly tone of voice. "Thanks to Atropos' knowledge of the past, I know all about your exploits in your world. Smashing pottery, breaking into people's homes, cheating at carnival games..."

Lachesis smiled softly, slowly, breaking her usual stoicism, and laughed melodically. "... and teasing chickens? My, my, you're quite a naughty little boy, aren't you?"

The sounds of Lenk's strained screams were drowned out by a hideous screech. Behind her mirror, Atropos scraped her claws against the glass surface. "No, you fool! Give him to me! I want his blood!"

Lachesis sighed, shaking her head slightly. "Elder sister, you are needlessly cruel. He is only a little boy, after all!"

Atropos slammed her head against the mirror's surface. "Little boys all grow into men! And no man may defile my temple! His life is forfeit!"

Finally, Lachesis' smile vanished, as she rounded on her older sister. "Too late, elder sister! You had your chance to claim him in the past. But I am the Goddess of the Present. This boy belongs to me now! And I say that a spanking will suffice for his–"

With an effort, Lenk lifted himself up off Lachesis' lap, and rolled onto the floor. Taken by surprise, Lachesis squealed, almost girlishly. Lenk tried to sprint for the exit, but his legs gave out under him. Struggling back to his feet, Lenk limped toward the door, clutching his hindquarters. He could barely walk, let alone run.

Scowling, Lachesis stood, and strode after Lenk. "Oh, no you don't. You can't run away from the spanking you have coming."

Lachesis snatched Lenk by the back of his collar, and twisted him around to face her, kneeling low to look him in the eye. “Look at you, stumbling over your own feet like a drunkard. Are you a coward?”

As tears streamed down his face, Lenk shook his head, and struggled to break free. “N-noo… I’m not afraid of–”

Lachesis reached around to plant a sharp pop across his bottom. “Liar! Of course you’re afraid. You *should* be afraid. Just look at yourself, a foolish, bare-bottomed brat, trying to run away from your fate…”

Lenk glanced down, and saw his undergarments tangled across his boots. He tried to reach down to pull them up, but Lachesis quickly slapped his backside, grabbed his hands, and pulled them up roughly behind his head to force him into the posture of surrender. “… No more fighting! You’ve been a naughty, wilful little boy, playing at being a hero. But that’s all over now. From now on, you’ll be treated the same way all bad boys should be…”

Slowly, Lachesis released her hold on Lenk’s arms, and held him by his waist. “With a long, hard spanking, just like you deserve.”

For emphasis, she added a few playful pats across the seat of his tunic. Instantly, Lenk dropped his hands, and tried to break her hold on him, but though he felt the magic of his gilded bracers spark to life, her grip was unbreakable.

Shaking her head, Lachesis scooped Lenk up by the waist. “Shame on you. Just for that, I’ll have to make this spanking go much harder for you, until you learn to behave, and submit to your fate.”

Lenk pumped his feet in mid air, as if trying to run away. “Nooo…”

Adjusting her grip on the boy, Lachesis pinned him under her arm, and flipped up his skirt to reveal his bare bottom, which was already covered with mottled, red handprints. “Oh, yes, child. I see that you have many magic treasures. Music that lets you swim through the river of time. Bracelets that grant you the strength of ten men. But none of that makes you a man in truth.”

Lachesis began the spanking again, but this time, she used her full strength with each and every slap. The moment the first spank landed, Lenk felt time slow to a crawl in the world around him. It was as if his body was frozen in ice, in sharp contrast to the blazing sting he felt where Lachesis’ palm impressed against his prone, defenseless backside. Dimly, Lenk tried to think of anything that would rescue his helpless hindquarters, before all thoughts faded away.

With every new slap, the frozen moment in time seemed to double in length, precisely at the moment of impact. After the tenth spank, Lenk sensed the frozen moment dragging on for what must have been a full ten seconds, before time began to move again. Exhausted, Lenk hung limp, gasping for air.

Lachesis gave Lenk a few not-so-gentle love taps across his bare behind, which were more than enough to flare up the stabbing stinging sensation. “Now, are you going to be a good boy, and hold still, or are you going to keep up this futile struggle?”

Lenk kicked his feet behind him. “Nooooo!”

Lachesis delivered another spank at full strength. Lenk tried to scream, only to feel the air turn to stone in his lungs. This time, the frozen moment in time lasted for what must have been several minutes. Lenk felt a stinging prickle travel across his bottom, like a thousand needles pressing into him, one at a time, before being plucked out and jabbing a new spot on his bottom, over and over again. Finally, it was over.

After waiting a few moments, Lachesis grabbed one of Lenk's leather boots, and tugged it off. "Once more, are you ready to be brave?"

Lenk whinged, tears and snot dripping down his nose. "Puh-leeeze..."

"Please, what?"

Lenk gulped for air, his voice growing shaky. "Please... I'll be good."

Lachesis petted his bottom gently, and flipped down his skirt. "That's more like it. Now, on your feet, little man."

Lenk sniveled as he was set back on his feet, and tottered in place unevenly as he noticed one of his boots was missing. He saw his undergarments dangling from his bare foot. Lachesis pointed firmly at his feet. "Take off your other boot."

Lenk hopped in place as he tried to pull it off his foot. Finally, he was forced to turn sheepishly, and sit down. He winced as he felt his bare bottom press against the hard, cold stone, but he was finally able to wrestle off the second boot. Noticing his undergarments, he reached for them, and started to pull them up before he heard Lachesis behind him, clicking her tongue sharply. "Tsk, tsk. There's no need for that strange loin cloth of yours. Fold them neatly, and hand them to me."

Blushing furiously, Lenk stood, and meekly offered up his white breeches. Lachesis accepted them, and tied the undergarments around her belt. "Now, take out all your weapons, one at a time, and lay them on the floor in front of me, in a neat line."

Sniffing, Lenk rubbed his nose on the back of his arm, and pulled open his satchel. Carefully, he pulled out all his weapons. His old slingshot. A boomerang. An adult-sized bow and quiver of arrows.

Lachesis watched carefully, until Lenk had emptied his satchel. “The bracelets too... and your sword and shield, of course.”

Fighting back tears, Lenk obeyed.

Lachesis spread her arms, gesturing to the collection of weapons. “These... toys. Some of them are too large for a boy your age... Yes, I think I begin to see. You carry the thoughts of your past with you. Once before, you passed down the corridors of time, and walked the world as a man, seven years older than you are now.”

Lenk only nodded. Lachesis picked up Lenk’s sword, and with a flick of her wrist, it vanished in a puff of smoke, along with the rest of Lenk’s equipment. Only his boots remained. “Then, you were sent back to your own time, with your lost youth restored to you... but you still remembered everything that happened to you in the other path along the river of time. All your struggles, your pain, your life as a warrior... you still carry all that with you, to this day.”

Lenk hung his head. Lachesis reached out a hand, and patted him across the cap on top of his head. “Poor, pitiable child. But none of that changes what must be. Once you were a man, a valiant hero, but now you must return to the life of a child... how humiliating.”

Lenk’s vision blurred, and he wept softly, but no matter how furiously he wiped his eyes, fresh tears continued to fall freely down his cheeks. Lachesis knelt, and pulled his hands away from his face, patting him gently along the back of his wrist. “There, there.

Now is not the time for tears. There will be plenty of time for crying soon enough, until all your tears have been cried out. But first… you still have a spanking coming."

Lenk whimpered, but Lachesis shook her finger under his nose. "Nuh-ah! None of that whining, young man. Now, pick up those filthy boots, and leave them by the front entrance to the throne room, out of sight. Then, march your naughty little bottom straight back here, so that I can spank you again."

Taking a deep breath, Lenk stooped to pick up his boots. Lachesis stroked her chin. "In fact, let's keep that bottom nice and bare from now on. That should help you remember your place, boy."

Lachesis waved her finger, and Lenk felt his skirt magically rising into the air behind him, exposing his bright red buttocks. Lenk stared at his scorched, sore seat, and glanced up at the woman with watery eyes, his lip quivering. But Lachesis kept silent and composed. Finally, Lenk bowed his head and trudged toward the exit. As he reached the hallway, he caught a glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel. There was freedom, only a short sprint away.

Lenk wanted to be brave. But what did that even mean any more? Slowly, he set his boots down in the hallway, and reemerged in the throne room. Lachesis smiled, and seated herself on her throne, beckoning him toward her. "Good boy. Brave boy. Come to *Mamá!"*

Steeling his breath, Lenk tried to hold his head high, but he couldn't stop from trembling as he approached the goddess. He halted in front of her, waiting for her to grab him and force him back across her terrible lap. Lachesis patted her bare thigh. "Up you get. Bottoms up."

Lenk climbed up the right side of the chair and crawled across her thighs. Immediately, she rested her left hand against the small of his back and raised her right hand high.

She started to spank at a slow, steady pace, once every few seconds, aiming at a new spot each time to cover every inch of Lenk's exposed buttocks and thighs with angry red marks. Lenk felt the fresh sting of each slap, and grit his teeth, trying to endure without crying. At the very least, he could retain his pride as a warrior. Lachesis smiled mysteriously, and paused the spanking. "Tell me, did you ever wonder why my temple was so easy for you to traverse? Why do you think there were no guards on patrol? No armed traps?"

As Lenk gasped for air, his eyes fluttered open, and he felt fresh tears budding against his eyelashes. "You wanted me to come here?"

Lachesis laughed, her voice almost musical. Then she began to spank again, harder than before, and faster, evening out the color of Lenk's bottom to a consistent, angry shade of blood red.. "You speak the truth of it. I foresaw that you would come here, and the terrible fate that awaited you. You see, we have a shared destiny. It is my duty to spank you for all eternity, as punishment for your naughty behavior."

Lenk howled a long, trailing war cry. "Oh, nooooo!"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!" With an effort, Lachesis put her full strength into her next three spanks, emphasizing each painful word. "Fear not, child, for you will not die. You see, time does not exist in this temple. Nor is there any need for sustenance. So I am free to spank you forever and ever, which is exactly what I intend to do."

Then she returned to the brisk, relentless rhythm, spanking once for every passing second.

Lenk kicked his feet, but the next spank landed with such force, he bucked in surprise, and let out a long, warbling wail.

From behind her mirror, Atropos watched the proceedings with undisguised menace. “Well, I say you’re being far too lenient with the fool.”

Lachesis sniffed. “Come now, sister. It is my right to show mercy to the living. And after all… he is only a little boy.”

Overwhelmed by the pain and humiliation, Lenk started to cry freely, exactly like the child he was. But his cries were soon drowned out by the steady sound of each resounding spank, and Lachesis' beautiful laughter.

[The End]

Lenk's Adventure in Heelfall

Chapter I: Capture

By Yu May and Gojira

Rhiannon sagged her head as she carried Lenk through the misty forests of Taormina. Lenk's long journey to find his lost friend Neviah had taken them to a strange realm where the laws of time and reality worked in mysterious ways. But even after rescuing the people of Taormina, Lenk felt no closer to achieving his goal. Ever since Isolde had returned him to his lost childhood body, Lenk had felt a strange sense of being out of place. No, not out of place. Out of time.

The mists parted and Lenk and Rhiannon emerged into an open landscape, rolling hills and fields, dotted with settlements, a few cottages with smoking chimneys. Too much smoke. Then, Lenk spotted a group of men, dressed in simple peasant garbs, fleeing from an armored figure riding on horseback, who was bearing down on the unarmed men.

Lenk spurred Rhiannon to a canter, and grabbed his elderwood shield as he swerved to intercept the path of the mysterious knight's charge.

The knight didn't hesitate, but Lenk thrust his shield to knock aside the incoming lance at a glancing blow. The knight's warhorse whinnied, and veered to the side, confused. The knight pulled at the reins, then rounded on Lenk. "Serf! You dare to challenge a knight of Queen–"

Lenk drew his slingshot from his belt and fired a spark seed at the knight. The moment the seed struck the knight's visor, it exploded in a burst of light. The knight screeched and fell backwards off the startled warhorse.

One of the peasants halted at the commotion. “That boy… he’s fighting a Queen’s Knight?”

Lenk dismounted and drew his sword. “Where are your fighting men?”

The peasant blinked, and a few more of the fleeing serfs stopped to watch Lenk curiously. “Fighting… men? But, there are no fighting men? Only women can be knights.”

The men’s clothing was strange to Lenk’s eyes, thin shawls of cheap sackcloth.

The knight groaned, and pulled back her helm, revealing a delicate face and long hair. Lenk narrowed his eyes, and pointed the sword to the woman’s throat. When Lenk had been trapped by the warrior women of the Garudan tribe, he’d seen women carrying swords and wearing armor. One had even worn the heavy iron armor of a dreadnaught. But unlike the hardy, sun-tanned women of the Garudan desert, this woman was strangely pale.

One of the peasants groaned. “Oh no, that boy struck a woman? Now we’re all surely doomed!”

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Lenk disarmed the knight, then questioned her. Lenk had entered the domain of Heelfall. The unnamed village, and all its inhabitants, were the royal property of Princess Charlotte. Rumors of rebellion had brought the lone knight to the village, where she had found a disgusting man delivering a speech on the so-called “rights of men.” Men, of course, had no rights in Heelfall, as all men were subject to the natural, divine authority of their mothers and wives. So, the knight had planned to quell the heresy by running down a few of the male peasants, before returning home.

Finally, Lenk suggested that the woman knight be sent on her way. He had expected the men of the village to object, perhaps to demand the woman's head on the spike, but the men seemed all too eager to let the woman go. Some of them bowed their faces flat against the ground, begging the woman to spare them, but she only laughed as she mounted her horse. "Dogs! You foolish men will pay dearly for this obstinance!"

Most of the men began to wail in despair, but the peasant who'd stopped to help Lenk led him aside. "I've never seen a boy your age show such courage... For that matter, I've never seen a man defeat a Queen's Knight, whatever his age."

The peasants introduced Lenk to the man who had delivered the public speech on men's rights which had so offended the Queen's Knight: Lord Chapman.

As a minor baron at the bottom of the noble hierarchy, Lord Chapman was a vocal supporter of the Men's Front, a pacifist group devoted to the liberation of men from matriarchal oppression, through non-violent means.

Lenk was invited to visit Lord Chapman's hold, a small stone structure at the top of the hill, or motte, overlooking the surrounding bailey. Lenk listened to Lord Chapman's story with interest, before he finally raised his hand to ask a question. "But, how will you ever be free, if you don't overthrow this Queen?"

Lord Chapman had glanced somewhat nervously at the window. "Weak men such as ourselves? Fighting against women? Everyone knows that women are vastly superior to men in terms of physical strength."

Lenk looked quizzical. Finally, Lord Chapman wiped his brow with a handkerchief, and continued. "Besides, we are all still loyal to the Queen. Once our beloved Queen hears of our legitimate grievances as men, she will surely grant me an audience to make the case

for Men's Rights. But we strictly reject any form of killing, beyond what is necessary for self-defense. But as you may have noticed... the men of my country are not suited to violence."

Lenk stroked his chin. "Then perhaps you should learn."

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Weeks passed. Lenk tried to teach the peasant men the art of sword fighting with a straw dummy, but they all seemed completely horrified at the idea of using a sword on anything vaguely resembling a woman. In the end, Lenk settled on teaching them the art of scouting and archery. Though all the men were still terrified at the very idea of facing a woman in battle, Lord Chapman did take Lenk's suggestion to raid supply wagons en route to the Queen's fortress. Fortunately, the men leading these wagons seemed all too eager to surrender immediately, and hand over anything they were delivering. Food, weapons, armor, textiles, all representing tithes and taxes from the surrounding villages. Soon, Lord Chapman's village was well equipped with everything a proper army could ever ask for.

After a month had passed, Lenk awoke and strolled the wooden fort walls, overlooking the men at work in the bailey. The blacksmith's hammer was ringing, the growing group of volunteer militia-men had gathered for morning archery practice. Lenk smiled. It seemed, at long last, that the peaceful men of this land had learned the art of war.

There was a thundering sound of a warhorn. Lenk glanced over the wooden battlement, and saw a platoon of soldiers approaching the walls of the bailey. Three knights rode at the front of the platoon. The knight at the center of the group wore black armor, and rode a magnificent white mare. Towering above the rest of the soldiers, the black knight held up a battle standard that bore a long, billowing flag. The leader of the knights

removed her helm, revealing a cascade of vivid, blood-red hair. “Cowardly men! Did you think your brigandry would escape notice?”

Lord Chapman’s face paled. “My Goddess! That’s General Alexandra!”

The tall woman planted her flag, and held aloft a heavy spear. “Lord Chapman! Your lands and title are forfeit. Open the gates, and submit to Princess Charlotte’s mercy. Perhaps, if you kiss her feet, our glorious princess may yet spare your life!”

One of the peasants stared at the platoon, trembling. “Are those three women all knights?”

Lenk smiled as he counted the soldiers, then he turned to call at the militia men. “That’s right... Hey, everyone! There are only fifteen of them. And only three of them knights! That’s nothing!”

The militia men all froze, staring up at Lenk like a herd of timid deer. “Princess Charlotte sent fifteen women? And three knights?” Then, all at once, they dropped their weapons and started running around, screaming like little girls as they crashed into each other and slipped on the mud. “Aaaagh! They have three knightly women! We’re all gonna’ die!”

“Or worse! If they take us alive, we’ll be locked in Princess Charlotte’s dungeon, and sentenced to a life of slavery and humiliation!”

“Mommy! I’m sorry, Mommy!”

One of the peasants charged toward the gates. “Let them in! If we surrender now, they may let us off with a good beating! Oh, please, General Alexandra! Have mercy! I wanted nothing to do with this rebellion.”

Lord Chapman grabbed Lenk's shoulders. "Lenk, there is no hope! We weak, pathetic, cowardly men can't possibly do anything in the face of such overwhelming odds. You know how women are, whenever a man starts to argue with them, they go insane!"

The raving peasant thrust open the gates, and grabbed at the wheel that controlled the wooden drawbridge. Slowly, the ropes started to lower the bridge down toward the opposite bank across the moat.

General Alexandra let her horse rear dramatically, then led it at a walk toward the open gate, just below the drawbridge. "Lord Chapman? Come down, little princeling. I would have words with you."

Lenk brushed off Lord Chapman. "These men are useless! But you're their only hope. You must escape, Lord Chapman, and rally more men to your cause."

"But... eighteen women! They are too many!"

Beneath them, the peasant weeped as he cranked the wheel to lower the bridge. "Spare me, mistress! I'll be good!"

Lenk drew his bow and knocked an arrow. "Then flee, Lord Chapman, and live to fight another day!"

Lenk shot an arrow at one the rope suspensions that held up the drawbridge. As the rope snapped in two, the drawbridge twisted in midair, and clattered to a halt as the second rope went taut. Beneath them, the cowardly peasant was knocked backwards as the wheel jolted. General Alexandra's horse whickered, before she pulled at the reins to calm the animal. But then Lenk let another arrow fly, severing the last remaining rope,

and when the drawbridge came slamming down, the horse panicked. General Alexandra clung tight to her saddle as her steed started to buck. “Woooaaah!”

Lenk heard one of the other knights bark a command, and saw one of the female footsoldiers raise her cross bow. With practiced precision, Lenk drew and fired an arrow, aiming at the cross bow itself. The woman screamed, stumbling backwards as Lenk’s arrow sunk deep into her weapon, and when she pulled the trigger, the bolt jammed with a metallic snapping sound.

General Alexandra secured her grip on the reins of her horse, and rounded to point at Lenk atop the wooden wall. “Get that boy!”

Lenk ran north along the wall, approaching the stone motte, and slapped his own rear end. “Nyah, nyah!”

Lenk ducked as a crossbow bolt whizzed past his scalp, nicking his cap.

Below, General Alexandra roared with the voice of military command. “No! Don’t shoot!”

Lenk ran blindly, then glanced behind him. Outside the wall, half of the foot soldiers were tracking him, but the three knights had broken off from the rest of the group, charging their horses inside the city. The peasant men screamed with terror as the horses barrelled over carts and baskets of their foodstuffs.

The remainder of the platoon followed the mounted knights on foot, swords and crossbows at the ready.

General Alexandra pulled ahead of the group. “Young man, you come down from there, right this instant!”

Lenk stopped as the path came to a sudden halt at the base of the stone tower at the top of the motte, the final line of defense for the village. Lenk turned, and found no sign of Lord Chapman. He could only hope that he had the sense to flee, along with any of his faithful followers, while the ferocious, fearsome females were still flummoxed.

General Alexandra halted beneath Lenk, and gestured to her women to order them to climb the rope ladder hanging from the wall. “It’s no use, boy. You’ve nowhere left to go.”

Lenk drew his shortsword with lightning speed and cut one of the ropes at his feet, then casually swung his sword and sheathed it behind his back. Beneath him, one of the footsoldiers squeaked and clung to the single remaining rope. Lenk spotted some ivy growing along the side of the stone wall, and started to scale it.

With a roar, one of the other mounted knights jabbed her lance, plunging it deep into the wooden door at the base of the stone fort. Then she pulled it free and barked at the foot soldiers behind her. “After him! You four, find anything that can work as a battering ram!”

Lenk winced as he heard two crossbow bolts chip against the stone tower, above and below him, before he reached the top of the tower. Lenk rolled behind the battlements, gasping for air, then risked a glimpse over the stone. Beneath him, he realized General Alexandra’s soldiers had found a pig trough, and were slamming it against the wooden door with little success. They tensed as General Alexandra dismounted from her horse, her heavy iron boots sending dust flying as she stomped her foot. Even the other mounted knights looked nervous as the gigantic woman glared at them all. “Fools! The

wood is too solid for that. Find a crow bar. An iron rod. Anything that can pry it open at the hinges."

Lenk grabbed his pouch of spark seeds, and spilled them over the wall. They bounced and tumbled off the wall, and when they struck the road below, each seed exploded with a blinding flash of light. The horses of the two mounted knights bolted, along with their furious riders, while the foot soldiers ducked for cover. Amidst the chaos, General Alexandra stood firm, her mouth tightening into a thin line. Finally, she raised her boot, and kicked down the solid oak door. "Enough."

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In Lord Chapman's armory, Lenk examined his surroundings. There was only one spiral staircase in the tower, and General Alexandra's platoon was surely scaling it now. Lenk spotted a barrel of stolen wine (that is, stolen by Princess Charlotte's tax collectors before the brave band of cowardly men stole it back to return it to its rightful owners). Rolling the barrel on its side, Lenk pushed it to the edge of the stairs, and sent it tumbling down.

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As the female foot soldiers scaled the steps, they heard a thumping sound, and froze. Then, the first foot soldier yelped as a wine barrel came bouncing toward her, knocking her flat on her back, before it rolled over the next two women with ease. One had the presence of mind to press against the wall, only for the barrel to slam down on her foot. She hopped on one foot, squealing in pain, before she lost her footing and landed on her rump.

General Alexandra stomped up the stone steps, then paused to listen to the commotion coming from ahead. Steeling herself, she gripped her spear, expecting to see an armed

warrior. Then, a barrel came rolling into view, along with three foot soldiers. Quickly, Alexandra jammed the butt of her spear into the stone steps at a sharp angle. The barrel slammed against the iron pole with enough force to send a ripple through the metal, before all the soldiers came crashing to a halt against it, but Alexandra held the spear firm, her arms quivering. Then, she slammed her fist into the barrel, letting the wine spill like red blood at her feet.

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Lenk slammed the door shut, and barricaded it. As he examined his surroundings, Lenk saw full suits of plate armor, swords, spears, crossbows, all manner of weapons suitable for an army of men. But all of them were far too big for him. He was trapped. Glancing at the window, Lenk wondered if he could scale back down the wall, only to see a footsoldier aiming her crossbow directly at him from the base of the tower.

Lenk ducked back just in time before a crossbow bolt shot through the open window.

Then, he heard a gentle knock at the door, and a deep, sonorous woman's voice from outside. "All right, little soldier. You're trapped. Open this door at once."

Lenk drew his sword, and readied himself, waiting for the door to burst open.

A few lingering seconds passed. The woman's voice was strangely calm. "I have come to parlay."

Lenk's arm shook as he pointed his sword at the door. "You're lying!"

"You have my word, as a knight, that no harm will come to you."

Something in the woman's voice struck Lenk. Slowly, he sheathed his sword, and unlatched the door. He waited a few more seconds, then finally, opened the door for her. Alexandra towered nearly to the ceiling behind the door, before she ducked her head low to enter the room. "I commend you for your valiant effort. You could easily have killed my troops. Why didn't you?"

Lenk held his head high to meet the tall woman's gaze. "Lord Chapman and his men have no desire to wage war on your Princess. They want only to be treated with the rights and dignity due to them as men of her realm."

Alexandra raised an eyebrow. "Men? Waging war? Absurd. War is women's work. And the right of every man is to submit to his queen. I can tell you are a stranger in this land. It's plain from your dress, your speech. Why involve yourself in this matter? How we treat our chattel is no concern of yours."

Lenk crossed his arms. "I'm a Royal Knight of Avalon. We swear an oath to defend the weak, and protect the innocent."

"A male knight? How strange. I admire your courage. However..."

Alexandra lowered herself into a defensive pose, holding up her spear. "... you are still a rebel, and a boy at that, and so must be disciplined."

Lenk hesitated, then lunged at the woman with a forward thrust. She deflected his stroke with such force, Lenk felt the impact rush up his arm, and barely kept his grip on his short sword. Lenk hopped backward, trying to keep out of range of the spear. He waited, expecting the woman to follow up with a quick counter-strike. But she only stood, like a stone statue, her spear at the ready. "The men here know their place. They would never dare to strike a woman, let alone a knight. But I see a strange look in your

eyes. You have the eyes of a warrior. Not like the weak men of this land. You've seen the color of blood before, haven't you, boy?"

Suddenly, Lenk remembered the moment he had struck the final blow on Madoc Dracomere, before the King of Evil had transformed into the monstrous form of the boar-demon, Magog. Lenk had buried the Sword of Evil's Bane in the throat of the beast, down to the hilt. Then, he saw the woman smile, and Lenk charged. Her spear ripped cleanly through his shield, jarring his right arm. Lenk twisted and crouched low, getting past the deadly spear point. He was in range. He leapt, and swung a horizontal stroke at the woman's face. Alexandra's eyes went wide as she saw the incoming sword stroke. Then, she dropped her spear, and caught Lenk by his waist, holding him in midair. Lenk's stroke sliced a thin line in the air, the point of the blade catching a lock of the woman's blood red hair dangling in front of her nose. Then, Alexandra lightly tossed Lenk in the air, snatched his sword arm by the wrist, and twisted his arm until he was forced to drop the blade. It clattered to the side. As Alexandra looked at him, her expression was a mockery of coy innocence. "Almost."

Grunting, Lenk kicked his feet, but the woman held him at arm's length as if he was no more than a baby.

Alexandra shook her head. "Ah, ah! You've lost this duel. Do not feel ashamed. That was a beautiful attack. If you were only a little taller, you would have killed me. However, you are still only a little boy, and therefore..."

Lenk looked down, and saw Alexandra nudging a wooden stool into the center of the room with her boot. Then she seated herself, and dropped him across her lap. As Lenk slapped down across her thick thighs, he realized she was as strong as any gorgon warrior he'd ever met. He felt a chill, and twisted to look for the source. Then, to his horror, he noticed that the woman had flipped up the skirt of his tunic, and was roughly tugging

down his white breeches with her great, huge hand. "... I have decided to spare your life. But I'm giving you a good spanking, right on your bare bottom."

Alexandra slammed her hefty palm down across Lenk's behind, easily covering both of his butt cheeks.

Lenk yelped with surprise, only for the woman to strike him again. This time, Lenk roared a war cry, and strained to break loose from her grip.

Alexandra only shook her head as she slowly raised her arm high. "None of that, little soldier. Despite being born a boy, you have the courageous heart of a woman. Now, try to endure your punishment with grace and resolve, as befitting of a warrior."

But as Alexandra delivered the third spank, Lenk gasped, and flailed his arms and legs to block his bottom. "Owww! It hurts!"

As she grabbed Lenk's wrist and twisted it into a firm grip against the small of his back, Alexandra groaned. "Then again, I suppose you are still just a silly boy, after all. And everyone knows little boys can't handle a little spanking, without crying like a newborn babe. It's in your nature. The Goddesses only gave to us women the ability to endure the terrible pain of childbirth. I'm sure that to your sensitive, boyish bottom, a light spanking must feel worse than most tortures would for a strong woman."

Lenk kicked his feet. "Nooo!"

Alexandra kicked up her foot, and pinned Lenk's feet between her thighs, and planted another ferocious slap. "Still, I won't tolerate such obstinance. If any of my foot soldiers showed such cheek, I'd spank her ass red and raw. So, I'll show you the exact same respect I'd show to a proper woman warrior."

With that, Alexandra began to spank at a brisk, relentless pace, keeping a steady rhythm. Lenk screamed once, before the pace of the spanking forced him to catch his breath. There was a sound of shuffling feet, and a group of footsoldiers appeared at the door, led by one of the armored knights. “General? Forgive us for following you, but we heard cries of distress, and came to find out... what is happening?”

Alexandra narrowed her eyes at the women. “I gave you all strict orders to wait for me at the base of the tower, while I dealt with our renegade rebel. March straight to our camp, and await my judgment. As soon as I finish spanking this naughty boy, I’ll rejoin you. I expect to see all your bottoms bare and ready for a birching when I arrive.”

The knight’s eyes widened behind her visor. “But, General, I only thought you’d want me to–”

By now, Lenk was gritting his teeth, hissing for air after each slap.

Alexandra continued spanking the boy without skipping a beat. “When I give an order, I expect it to be followed. In this instance, a simple spanking will suffice as the penalty for your indiscretion. Or would you prefer a court martial for insubordination, Lieutenant?”

The knight saluted. “No, ma’am! Please punish me for my stupidity, as you see fit, ma’am!”

“Hmmph. And how else would I punish you, Lieutenant? Never mind. Go collect a good bundle of switches. And if any of the local serfs ask what you are up to, I expect you to explain to them exactly how they are going to be used.”

The knight trembled, but held her salute. “Yes, ma’am! To cane me on my bare backside, ma’am!”

“Correct. In fact, might as well get those bottoms bared now. You, foot soldiers, help the Lieutenant out of her armor, then undress yourselves.”

By this point, Lenk felt tears watering his vision, and shut his eyes tight, trying to suck down a breath. He felt like he was trapped beneath the Water Temple.

Alexandra paused the spanking for half a beat, then delivered a ferocious slap that sent ripples deep through Lenk’s tensed glutes. Finally, the boy cried, and two tear drops spilled down his cheeks. Alexandra smiled. “Gather the rest of the platoon. I’ll be with you in a few minutes.”

The minutes dragged on, second after painful second. Alexandra paused her lecturing, letting the relentless spanking do all the talking for her. Lenk cried freely, but as the spanking dragged on and on, his voice cracked, and his sobs grew more desperate. Then, finally, the spanking paused, and he felt something cool press against his bottom. Blinking back tears, Lenk glanced over his shoulder, and saw Alexandra tracing circles along his buttocks with her index finger.

Alexandra smiled as she examined the results of her work. Then she released her leg lock on Lenk, and adjusted her grip on his waist, stroking his upturned bottom gently, as if to comfort him. “Such cute, little buttcheeks you have. And they’re already quite red, though the color is a bit uneven. If you were an ordinary, weak, naughty little boy, I’d be more than satisfied. However, I also promised you I’d treat you like I’d treat a grown woman.”

Lenk tensed, and shook his head. This time, his face was nestled against Alexandra's hefty thigh, but he had no energy left to fight. He tried to say something, but a dribble of snot dripped from his nose, and he stammered. "N–nuh..."

Alexandra landed a firm clap against Lenk's right butt cheek, then his left, alternating between each to cover every square inch of his hindquarters with fresh spanks. Slowly, the mottled red marks flushed to a more consistent shade of red, perfectly matching the vivid hue of a gorgon ruby.

Lenk didn't know how long the spanking lasted. He had lost all sense of the passing of time. But by the time it finally ended, he could barely move from exhaustion.

Alexandra pinched each of Lenk's butt cheeks lightly, whistling as she felt the radiant heat. "That will do. Of course, if you were guilty of treason, I would have to see you hanged... or thrown in the dungeon..."

Lenk whimpered. This was the end. He had failed. Then, Alexandra scooped him up off her lap, and held him against her bosom. "... But I think I have a much better idea, for a brave boy like you."

***

In the courtyard outside the stone fort, the Lieutenant and her footsoldiers gathered fresh birch switches. The Lieutenant was wearing only her chainmail shirt, which had been hiked up at the back to reveal her bare buttocks. The footsoldiers had been forced to go bottomless, their hauberk pantaloons tied around their shoulders. A few of their companions watched them with a mix of genuine sympathy and undisguised relief.

Then, General Alexandra emerged from the tower, cradling a sniffling boy in her arms. "Where is Lord Chapman, and the rest of his traitor rebels?"

The remainder of the troop glanced at each other nervously. One of the knights shuffled her feet, then stepped forward. “Um… I fear he escaped in all the commotion?”

“Fools! This boy was the only true warrior amongst these cowards! We were ordered to quell this rebellion!”

“Maybe… we could slaughter the remaining villagers, and take their men as our concubines?”

Alexandra scoffed. “No. The serfs will be put to better use come harvest season. Never mind the weaklings. Come with me. We must remind these cowardly men of the price of treachery.”

Alexandra strolled down the hill toward the market square at the center of the bailey, and climbed the steps to stand on the scaffold, which held stockades and a gallows. Lenk tensed as the giant woman held him tight against her chest, before her voice boomed, ringing clearly above the sounds of the murmuring crowd. “Hear ye, hear ye, loyal subjects of the Queendom of Heelfall. Rejoice, for you are free from the threat of insurrection. Princess Charlotte is merciful. She knows that you common folk had no part in the treachery of Lord Chapman’s revolt. All who bow the knee, and kiss the royal standard, will be graciously pardoned.”

Alexandra held Lenk up high with both hands, then spun him to expose his backside to the gathering crowd. Lenk tensed as he noticed for the first time that Alexandra had hiked up his skirt, tucking it into his belt to reveal his glowing, red, bare buttocks for all to see. Alexandra ignored Lenk’s pleading eyes, her voice steady, her face composed. “The rebel leaders may have escaped, but we have taken one of their best weapons away from them… and I have gained a son.”

The soldiers cheered lustily, and the gathering peasants joined half-heartedly. Alexandra rested Lenk's head on her shoulder, cradling him with one arm as she patted him across the bottom with her free hand. The gentle love taps were more than enough to awaken the angry sting of his recent spanking. "He will learn the true meaning of discipline and obedience. And one day, though he is only a young man, he may yet become a true knight. A knight worthy of serving Crown Princess Charlotte, and our glorious Queendom!"

As Alexandra waved to the crowd, she leaned in close to Lenk's ear, and whispered in a soft, low voice. "Of course, if you misbehave, I'll have to spank you again. But I know you will grow up to be a proper gentleman, one day!"

Lenk's lip quivered. He wanted to break free, and fight the entire platoon of soldiers. If only he had his adult body, he knew he could have defeated them all. Still carrying Lenk, Alexandra mounted her white horse, and led it toward the gates of the bailey.

Then, Lenk heard a familiar horse's call. A footsoldier stepped out of the town stable, leading a young Clydesdale filly by her reins. "General Alexandra! We found a strange warhorse. Much too noble a breed for these peasants. We think it belongs to one of the rebel leaders!"

Lenk's eyes went wide as he recognized Rhiannon. She was the only friend he had left in this strange land. Alexandra glanced down at Lenk with a curious look. "Hmm... very good soldier. I think that horse did indeed belong to a rebel leader. But not any more. Lenk, my child, how would you like to be the master of that beautiful horse?"

Lenk felt tears springing to his eyes. "Please, don't hurt her!"

Alexandra smiled softly. “Hurt her? Of course not. She is a loyal steed. Of course, I expect you to take good care of her. Because if you don’t… Momma will have to spank you. Understood?”

Lenk felt a surge of rage. But then he remembered he was only a boy again. He couldn’t remember his mother’s face. The last time he had been close to anyone that felt like a mother was when he had said goodbye to Saria at the edge of Nibelung forest. Lenk buried his face against Alexandra’s massive bosom. “Yes, Mommy…”

***

Lenk’s bedroom had everything a spirited, adventurous young boy could ever dream of. A sword and shield mounted on the wall. A bookshelf full of magnificent stories of adventure and great warriors. A training dummy, built to endure years of daily use.

But at the moment, the most notable thing was the bed at the center of the room. It had been stripped of all its blankets and sheets, which had been tied into a makeshift rope which led out the open window.

Clad in her pajamas, General Alexandra was seated on the edge of the bare bed, walloping Lenk’s bare bottom with a heavy wooden hairbrush. His tunic was folded neatly at the foot of his bed, along with his trusty leather boots. At the moment, Lenk was as naked as a newborn baby, and was mewling and blubbering like one too. “Please, Mommy! Not the hairbrush! It hurts!”

Alexandra harrumphed, but didn’t pause the spanking for a moment. Each crack of the hairbrush sent ripples through Lenk’s bottom. “It hurts? And what if your grip had slipped, and you’d broken your neck? How bad do you think that would have hurt?”

Lenk hooted as the force of the spanking slowly built to a crescendo. “Yeeiipe! I’m sorry, Mommy! I’m sooo sorrrryyy!”

Alexandra smiled. Her adopted son was just so cute, she couldn’t stay mad at him. But she had a maternal duty to fulfill, and she intended to do a thorough job. “You’re sorry now, but not as sorry as you're going to be, little soldier!”

Alexandra increased the tempo of the spanking, without letting up on the relentless force. Lenk screeched, his resolve breaking down entirely. “Aaauu! Bahaw! Waaaaah–augh!”

Alexandra aimed the hairbrush in circles, covering the sides of Lenk’s bottom and the undercurves where his lower buttocks connected to his upper thighs. Then she aimed another six of the most ferocious blows yet, directly across the center of each buttock. Alexandra stretched her arm, ignoring Lenk’s pitiful wails. “There, that should do for tonight. But you know the rule for trying to run away from home. You can expect another spanking tomorrow morning. At daybreak, I’m sending you straight to the grove to whittle a proper-sized rod for your next spanking. You’ll get a good caning in the courtyard, so all the man-servants can see what happens to naughty little boys who try to sneak out of their rooms after dark.”

Lenk sniveled. “Puh-leeeze! I won’t run away ever again!”

Alexandra scooped the naked boy up, and cradled him. “Hmm. I’d like to believe you. But I’ll have to keep an eye on you tonight.”

Lenk hiccuped as he tried to catch his breath, covering his front with both hands.

Alexandra carried the boy to her sparse, plain bed chamber, and set him down on his feet. Then she pulled out a night shirt, and pulled it over the boy's head. Lenk held out his hands to let Alexandra dress him, then clutched his bottom, sniffling.

Alexandra watched him closely. "Are you unhappy, Lenk? Do you want to run away because you don't want to live here any more?"

Lenk bowed his head. "No... that's not it. I wasn't gonna' run away forever. Just for a little while."

Alexandra raised an eyebrow. "Oh? And what exactly were you planning to do?"

Lenk shuffled his feet. "Just... take Rhiannon on a ride around the castle. We used to go all sorts of places, all by ourselves. You don't have to worry about me."

Alexandra stroked Lenk's cheek. "Well, it's my job to worry about you, because you're my little soldier now. If you wanted to leave home to explore for a bit, all you had to do was ask. But I expect you to ask for permission to leave, and report back to headquarters before dark, like a good soldier should."

Lenk looked at Alexandra with watery eyes. "You mean... you're not mad at me?"

Alexandra kissed Lenk on the top of his head. "Of course not. Sometimes, you can be a foolish, naughty little boy. But you're my foolish, naughty little boy. Understood?"

Lenk wiped his nose on the back of his sleeve, and smiled. "Yes, ma'am."

Alexandra scooped Lenk up and sat him on her lap, wiping away the last of his tears. "And you understand that you still have another spanking coming to you, tomorrow morning, right, son?"

Lenk nodded, and kissed her cheek. “Yes, Mommy.”

Alexandra cooed, and laid down on her bed, letting Lenk nuzzle against her breasts. “Good boy.”

[End of Chapter I]

Lenk's Adventure in Heelfall

Chapter II: Training

By Yu May and Goji

Lenk's hands trembled as he offered up the birch branch he had cut and trimmed himself to his new adopted mother, General Alexandra. Alexandra hummed, and examined the heavy switch carefully. As requested, it was thicker than the breadth of Lenk's thumb. Every stroke of this rod would raise a thick, angry, red welt; at least, it would in the proper hands, and against the proper bottom.

Behind her, Alexandra overheard the sounds of soldiers snickering, and spotted a few of the castle guards whispering from behind their hands. Alexandra scowled. She would have to report them to the Captain of the Guard for breaking decorum. They'd get off lightly with a public strapping. But for now, Alexandra was content to let them have their fun. A few giggling witnesses would make this experience all the more humbling for her errant young charge. Alexandra whipped the rod to point towards a long wooden bench at the side of the castle courtyard. "Very good, soldier. You've prepared a fine switch, but now you must prepare yourself for your switching. Bare your bottom at once, then march straight to that bench, and rest your weight on your elbows. Keep your legs straight, and your head up."

Lenk's cheeks and ears flushed red as he overheard the guards and footsoldiers tittering. Carefully, he pulled down his own breeches, holding down the hem of his tunic's skirt, then toddled towards the bench, his undergarments tugging at his ankles. Meekly, Lenk raised his own skirt, tucked it into the back of his belt to expose his buttocks, which was already marked with mottled red-violet bruises from his last spanking, and assumed the position for his next spanking. Lenk groaned as he felt his aching bottom stretch and tingle.

He heard heavy bootsteps as General Alexandra approached him and tapped the birch rod against his rump. “All right, young man. I want you to let everyone here know why you are getting this caning.”

Lenk mumbled softly under his breath, but with a quick flick of her wrist, Alexandra snapped the rod across his bottom. “Speak up.”

Lenk hissed, but resisted the urge to flinch. “I tried to run away from home last night. And I almost made it, too.”

Alexandra tapped the rod twice across Lenk’s behind. “None of that cheek. Now, tell us what happens to naughty little boys who turn their bed sheets into escape ropes and go climbing down castle walls?”

“We get spankings, on our bare bottoms, for being naughty.”

Alexandra stroked the hand-made cane along Lenk’s bottom. “That’s right. You will get six of the best instructors for each offense. Six for trying to run away… and another six, for making a mess of your bed. Now, what do you say when it’s time for a spanking, young man?”

Some of the onlookers chuckled with undisguised mirth at this mirth. They knew from experience that the General had a knack for making punishments humiliating for any soldier who failed in her duty. Lenk took a deep breath. “Yes, Mommy. Please spank me, just like I deserve.”

Immediately, Alexandra delivered a mean stroke of the switch across Lenk’s buttocks with trembling force. Lenk howled, and kicked up his foot as he felt the rod lancing across him, like a knife cutting through warm butter. Alexandra tapped the tip of the rod against Lenk’s boot. “Foot down. That one doesn’t count.”

Lenk growled, then stomped his foot down with force. The watching soldiers froze in terror, wondering how Alexandra would deal with this obstinacy. But to their surprise, Alexandra actually smiled, turning to look at the onlookers with a meaningful look. Then, without looking, she delivered a backhand stroke of the rod, aimed precisely across the center of Lenk's buttocks. Alexandra waited a few seconds, then counted. "One."

Lenk resisted the urge to kick as Alexandra delivered the next set of strokes. After the sixth, she paused for almost an entire minute, stretching her arm, and switching the switch to her other hand. Lenk took shaky breaths, and felt the seven throbbing, tingling welts, all in neat lines.

Finally, Alexandra began the switching again. This time, she aimed a stroke diagonally, cutting across several of the previous welts. "One."

Lenk winced as the last stroke awakened a fresh sting across his current set of stripes, before the next one landed just below the last. Lenk twitched, his knees knocking together, but didn't kick. Alexandra smiled. "Two."

Immediately, she landed the third stroke, without giving Lenk time to catch his breath. He cried in surprise, his hat flopping as he arched his back. Lenk's knees buckled, before he straightened his legs and obediently held up his bottom. Alexandra was impressed. She had expected Lenk to give her a reason to start the count over from the beginning long ago. "Three."

Alexandra strolled to Lenk's other side, and examined her work. This time, she decided, she would aim a stroke at a new angle, to create a cross-hatch pattern of welts over the previous set. Alexendra raised her arm high and swung the rod with a snap of her elbow. She waited until Lenk finished howling, and counted. "Four."

For the last two strokes, Alexandra changed her tactics again. This time, she used more follow through, making sure the rod sank deep into the meat of Lenk's glutes. Lenk almost choked, and caught himself roughly on his elbows to avoid banging his head against the bench. Alexandra took a shaky breath. "Five."

She delivered the last stroke with equal force. Lenk screamed, and collapsed onto his knees. The onlookers gasped. Lenk's eyes popped open as he realized his mistake. Quickly, he rose to his feet, awaiting the General's terrible judgment.

The seconds dragged on. Finally, Lenk dared to glimpse over his shoulder. General Alexandra looked stern, implacable. "Young man, you left your position. If you were one of my sword-women, I would start your caning all over again, right from the beginning, just for that."

Lenk sniffled, then bowed his head, holding his bottom high for the spanking to begin again. "I'm sorry, Mommy. Please finish my spanking."

Looking furious, Alexandra tapped the cane against Lenk's behind, and held it. Then finally, Alexandra cracked a smile, and shrugged. "But on the other hand, you're not one of my sword-women. Boys will be boys, after all."

Lenk blinked. "You mean... my spanking is over?"

Alexandra knelt, and patted Lenk on the head. "Of course the spanking is over, you silly child. There is definite room for improvement, but you took your first caning about as well as I expected you to."

Alexandra pulled Lenk into a gentle hug, then reached around to pet his still exposed hindquarters. "Now, gird your loins."

Lenk blushed, and quickly stooped to pull up his breeches. The women erupted in laughter as Lenk fixed his clothing, before a strange, black-haired woman strolled into the courtyard. She was nearly as tall as General Alexandra, but more lithely built. She wore a red military jacket with golden-tassled pauldrons and a dainty pair of spectacles. "Enough of that racket! You lot, shame on you. Women of the Royal Guards, acting like a pack of school girls. I expect to see you all at the flogging post, wearing your shifts, and nothing else, before mess."

Alexandra turned to face the black-haired officer. "Morning, Captain Anita."

Anita straightened her posture, and saluted. "General Alexandra. Please, forgive my guards-women's lack of manners."

"Oh? And if I forgive them, will you take their flogging for each of them?"

Anita held her salute with perfect resolve. "Yes, ma'am! If that is your judgment."

Alexandra turned to the royal guards. "And what say the accused? Will you let your commanding officer take the punishment that is due to you?"

The armored guards quickly saluted. Despite the fact they were all wearing helmets that obscured their faces, somehow, they were all clearly shame-faced. One of the guards spoke. "General Alexandra, Ma'am. If it is your will, please allow us the honor to accept our own floggings."

Alexandra nodded. "So be it. Report to the flogging posts promptly, as you were ordered. Captain Anita, your women's loyalty speaks well of you. So, I'll leave the fate of their bottoms to you."

“Thank you, ma’am!”

Alexandra waved a hand. “At ease, Captain. I have a favor to ask. I’ve recently adopted a son, Lenk. He likes to play at combat with swords, and I’d like you to personally see to his training in fencing.”

Anita glanced at Lenk, raising an eyebrow. “A boy? Learning to sword fight?”

Alexandra giggled. “I know. The child is quite the tomboy. Of course, I expect you to be strict with him. What do you say, Lenk? Would you like to learn how to properly fence?”

Lenk clenched his fists. “I already know how to sword fight.”

All eyes in the courtyard were on Lenk. Alexandra’s smile vanished. “Then I expect to hear an excellent report from Captain Anita after your first lesson. Is that understood, young man?”

Lenk sensed the unspoken threat behind the words, and tensed. “Yes, ma’am.”

Alexandra glared at Lenk, then pinched his cheek gently. “That’s the spirit, son. You, shield-maidens, bathe the boy, then help him dress for his first lesson.”

Lenk’s pointed ears twitched as the women approached him. “But–”

Then one of the shield-maidens scooped him up by the waist, and cradled him against her shoulder to carry him away.

Alexandra waved a finger at Lenk’s face. “And if he gives you any trouble in the tub, you have my permission to spank him soundly. Do let me know if he misbehaves, of course.

Remember, Lenk, if another woman has to spank you on my behalf, for any reason, you can expect another spanking from me before bedtime."

The moment the two women were out of earshot, they erupted in girlish squeals of delight. The one carrying Lenk gasped for air, fighting to stop laughing. "Omigosh! He's sooo cute!"

Lenk felt his face burning, and tried to look away.

The second shield-maiden cooed "Aw, you're embarrassing him. Look, his ears are all red!"

"Not to mention his poor bottom! Tee hee!"

***

During Lenk's bathtime, the shield-maidens held a teasing argument about which of them should spank him, if he splashed too much in the tub. At this, Lenk started to cry softly, and both girls promised not to spank him, assuming he behaved himself.

In the end, Lenk managed to avoid a bathtime spanking. After a thorough scrubbing, he was dressed in a fresh set of his own clothing, one of his old tunics, and escorted to the barracks.

The fencing hall was a long, narrow, high-ceilinged room. Lines in chalk marked rectangular arenas for fencing practice. To the sides, a few knights were practicing fencing with girl squires, some barely older than Lenk.

Captain Anita stood in the central arena with her hands folded behind her, then turned to face Lenk. “Ah, the aspiring sword fighter has arrived. Thank you shield-maidens, you are dismissed.”

The two maidens looked disappointed, but bowed their way out, slamming the door behind them. Lenk crossed his arms, and glowered at Captain Anita, pouting.

Anita bowed at the waist to look Lenk carefully in the eye, and traced a finger along his long, pointed ear. “Strange. Is that a common trait in your home country?”

Lenk clapped a hand against his ear. “It’s just an ear. Everyone has them.”

“None of the men here have ears shaped like knives. I expect a proper answer to my question, soldier.”

Lenk bowed his head, his face burning. “Yes, ma’am. Everyone in Av–”

Lenk stammered before he accidentally blurted out the name of Avalon Kingdom.
“–My home country. We all have ears like this.”

Anita curled her lip. “And what is the name of your home country?”

Lenk held his head up, trying not to blink as he stared back at Anita. Finally, she cracked a smile. “Come now, child, what is the harm in telling the name of your home? Afraid we’ll conquer it?”

“I am a Knight of Avalon Kingdom, dubbed by Princess Isolde herself. You’ll never conquer our home.”

“A Kingdom? How strange. At least you have a proper Princess to knight you. Though if all the knights are as little as you, I doubt it’d be a difficult conquest.”

“I’m not–” Lenk almost denied being little, but caught himself. “–I’m not afraid.”

Anita let the moment hang, then giggled. “Such pluck. Fetch a training sword, and we can begin.”

“I prefer my own sword and shield.”

“A sword and board fighter? I’ve seen your adorable little sword. A well made blade, but you’ll be using a wooden practice sword, same as everyone else.”

“I fight better with my own weapons.”

“And I fight better with a spear. I hear your duel with General Anita ended rather quickly. But we will begin with the basics. If you do not want a spanking before the fencing lesson, then fetch a training sword.”

Lenk grit his teeth, and collected a wooden sword from the racks. He felt the eyes of the women knights and girl squires following him as they paused their training.

When Lenk returned to the central arena, Anita drew her own wooden sword, and took a defensive stance. “Your first lesson: always gauge your opponent. There is no shame in being the weaker fighter, so long as you resist cowardice. Try to break my defense.”

Lenk entered into a ready stance, holding his sword behind him. He gripped the hilt so tightly with his left hand, he felt his knuckles trembling.

Anita smiled. “You are left-handed? How peculiar. I imagine that would throw a lesser opponent off her guard.”

Lenk charged, twirling the sword in his left hand. Anita’s brows furrowed, before she parried his first wild thrust, and hopped backwards. Lenk pressed the attack, flowing gracefully into a well-practiced attack combo. He had to keep pressing forward to stay in range, forcing Anita nearly out of the arena. She spun lightly away from the final strike of his attack, and retreated back toward the center of the ring. “Good, ferocious offense. Though a bit wild on your approach. Next, try to–”

Lenk jumped backwards, spinning wildly to press his attack without losing any of his earlier momentum. Anita gasped, and held the sword in a close guard, barely parrying each new attack. Finally, she answered with a low diagonal stroke aimed at Lenk’s skull. Lenk hopped to the side, craning his neck to let the sword glance off his scalp, and attempted to flank Anita from her right side. Only Anita’s footwork saved her from getting poked in the stomach. She was forced to stumble backward awkwardly, but just out of range. Lenk jumped in the air to deliver a flying downward stroke to her skull.

At the last moment, Anita dropped to the ground, blocking Lenk’s attack with such force, he felt his arm jam from the impact. Anita rolled backwards, and sprang lightly back to her feet. Around them, a few of the women and girls started to murmur. “I’ve never seen anyone press the Captain that hard.”

Lenk gasped for air. He’d put everything he had into that relentless attack, and already he felt the strain take its toll on his muscles.

Anita took a shaky breath. “Incredible. Pure instinct. You’ve clearly trained yourself... but your attacks fall short of their mark. That’s the sort of aggressive ‘dog-fighting’ style I’d expect from a big barbarian. You’re not taking your small stature into account.”

Lenk gulped for air. The wooden sword was longer than his shortsword. Despite its humble appearance, something about the weight of the plain sword triggered a memory: it reminded him of holding the Sword of Evil's Bane, when he had still had his adult body as the Ageless Hero. But he had no shield to work with. Lenk steadied his breath, and held up his sword in a two-handed guard, the kind he used with larger weapons.

The moments dragged on, and as he waited for Anita's attack, Lenk saw her expression change. But, strangely, Anita didn't look angry. Her face was perfectly calm.

She understood his silent challenge. It was as if Lenk was saying, "Come get me."

Then Anita thrust forward, holding her sword in one hand. Lenk deflected her attacks, retreating to keep out of her strike range. Anita's attack was almost like a dance: fluid, composed. It reminded Lenk of the fighting of the Thieves of Garudan, all women, who fought with graceful, curved scimitars.

After Anita delivered three elegant attacks, Lenk tried to take her by surprise with a quick stab, but she glided out of the way of his sword point, and spun to face him. "So, you do know more than how to lunge like a wild dog. Bravo. There's no faking a solid defense. So, we come to the last lesson of the day, which is the same as the first: always gauge your opponent."

But Lenk didn't answer.

Anita switched her stance to match Lenk's, even mirroring his two handed grip. "I have a confession to make. When I heard that General Alexandra had caught the infamous wild-boy who'd joined Lord Chapman's rebellion, I was sorely tempted to give you a good drubbing, just to teach you a lesson. Those rebel dogs deserve no mercy. But you've fought so admirably that–just this once–I'm willing to offer you a draw."

The watching audience held their breath. Lenk narrowed his eyes. “What if I don’t want to call it a draw?”

Anita fixed her spectacles. “Then we can finish our duel. But if we continue, I’m fighting you to win, and if I win, I’m punishing you as I see fit.”

Lenk relaxed his grip on his sword. “And if I win?”

Anita closed her eyes, and smiled. She looked almost girlish. “Why, then you can spank me, of course.”

Lenk switched from his two-handed grip back to his left-handed fighting style, but with a twist. He imitated his wild approach, then feinted, ducking to the side to attack Anita on the left, away from her sword arm.

Anita seemed to fall for the feint, hesitating as she tried to block. Lenk saw his opening, and with a triumphant war cry, he struck.

Then, Anita lightly switched her sword to her left hand, and deflected Lenk’s attack. Lenk’s eyes popped open as he stumbled forward, before Anita spun her sword and flicked the flat of the wooden blade across his bottom. Lenk gasped as he felt his cane strokes from earlier that morning scream in protest.

Lenk spun to defend, but Anita had gone on the attack, using her left hand to strike with a series of ferocious, flowing strokes. It was Lenk’s own fighting style. Lenk blocked three of the blows before the last one crashed against him with such force, it knocked him backwards, landing flat on his sore bottom.

Then, Lenk felt the tip of a wooden sword against his throat. Anita shook her head. “Tut, tut. You’ve failed your first test. Always gauge your opponent. I’m afraid you’ve

developed some bad habits as a sword fighter. You fight like a wild dog. So I'll just have to train you, just like a puppy, to break you of those habits. And the best way to train a foolish puppy…"

Anita knocked Lenk's sword out of his hand, and took him by the wrist, roughly helping him up onto his feet, then reached around to pat his bottom playfully with her wooden sword. "… is to swat it across its cute little tail."

Lenk shook his head, and grabbed roughly at Anita's wrist. "No! You can't!"

Anita frowned as Lenk forced her to drop her wooden sword, then grabbed him by the collar of his shirt. "Too late, pup. I'm afraid I can. I think a good spanking will teach you to quit while you're ahead. Let's find a suitable spot for the 'seat of learning.'"

Anita led him out of the fencing hall, onto the rampart of a stone battlement that overlooked the courtyard. Lenk had just enough time to notice that the battlement had been set up with chairs and stools to act as a leisurely spot for the castle's inhabitants, before his terrible dread of the coming spanking drove the thought from his mind.

Anita led Lenk toward a chair, and seated herself. Lenk's hands flailed to break her grip, but she calmly pulled down his undergarments, and plopped him down across her left thigh, raising her right hand high. "A mistake like that would have gotten you killed in a real duel. Therefore, you need proper motivation, to teach you better. This is for your own good, pup."

With that, Anita brought her hand down sharply across Lenk's bare bottom. He howled in pain, feeling the sting keenly along with the ache of his previous caning.

The gathered women gasped with delight as they watched Anita begin to spank Lenk in earnest. Captain Anita wasn't quite as strong as the gigantic General Alexandra, but

what Anita lacked in muscle, she made up for with precision. In contrast to Alexandra's "heavy-handed" approach, Anita kept her palm steady, and used her wrist to add a little extra friction to each spank. Lenk instantly noticed the difference, and at the moment, he wasn't sure which was worse.

The fact that the spanking wasn't overwhelmingly forceful meant that Lenk could hear every word as Anita began to lecture him in a gentle, sing-song voice. "I'm afraid this spanking is absolutely necessary, so that you never even think of trying anything so foolish ever again. I made note of the defiant look in your eyes while we were sparring. You are a willful boy."

There was a sound of heavy footsteps, and General Alexandra appeared at the doorway. "I hear the tell-tale sounds of one hand clapping... Oh dear, Captain Anita? Has my son been a handful for you today?"

Lenk's pleading quickly melted into incoherent yammering. Anita nodded, without pausing the spanking. "I'm afraid so, General. From the state of this bottom, and his reaction to this spanking, I can tell that your discipline has already had a positive effect on the boy."

Already, Lenk had started to cry softly. Alexandra sighed as she watched the proceedings. "Thank you, but it's clear Lenk needs a good spanking, and lots more of it. Since he is still just a boy, he will have to learn his place–even if he is being trained to be a knight one day. Lenk, dear, I'm afraid I'll have to punish you. You know I promised you a spanking before bedtime if you earned a spanking from your instructor."

Lenk gagged, and tried to scream a protest, before another spank cut him off, and he let out a warbling wail of woe. Anita giggled. "I don't see how you have the heart to punish him so strictly. He's so cute, it breaks my heart to have to spank him. Just listen to him cry! He sounds just like a poor, woebegone little puppy."

Alexandra nodded. “Yes, I hate to have to spank the darling boy. But nevertheless, I want you to spank him soundly, before every fencing lesson”

Anita giggled. “Oh, don’t worry. Lenk may be like an untrained, disobedient puppy for now. But I’m sure that routine trips over my lap will teach him to behave.”

Alexandra watched Anita’s hand rise and fall with interest. “My goodness, listen to how he’s carrying on. How do you do it? He’s such a strong-willed lad, even I sometimes have trouble getting him to shed real tears.”

Anita landed a particularly firm swat with an upward angle of her arm, gliding it across Lenk’s upper bottom, before lifting her knee to reveal Lenk’s hidden sit-spots, just below the puppy fat under his bottom. “Oh, it’s all in the wrist. A good spanking should always end in tears after all!”

Then, Anita started the spanking all over again, concentrating her attention on the newly exposed area, and Lenk started to shed thick, messy teardrops.

Alexandra cooed with admiration. “Captain Anita, would you help me give Lenk his bedtime spanking tonight? I feel my son would benefit from your guiding hand.”

Anita smiled sweetly, and delivered a final, resounding spank. Lenk howled like a wolf pup, then broke down with a final groan, and gurgled weakly.

Anita patted the upturned, glowing, crimson buttocks before her, then stood, cradling Lenk in her arms. “I would be honored to assist you, General Alexandra. Lenk was most fortunate to be adopted by you. You were kind to rescue him from those rebel curs.”

Lenk reached weakly toward Alexandra, and she accepted Lenk into her arms, patting the back of his shoulders, and kissing his cheek. “Well, I’ve always believed every boy needs a strong, female role model in his life. I hope he comes to think of you as a second mother. Have you learned your lesson, Lenk?”

Weeping softly, Lenk’s breath hitched as he tried to speak. “Y-yes, Mommy.”

Alexandra set Lenk back on his feet, and tucked the back of his skirt into his belt to expose his bare, spanked bottom. “And what do you say to your teacher?”

Lenk shuffled his feet, struggling to look Captain Anita in the eye. “So-s-sorry, for being st-st-stupid, t-teacher. Th-thank you for sp-spa-spanking me. P-puh-please... forgive me?”

Anita held Lenk’s hand, and patted it. “Aw, just like a sad puppy, with his tail between his legs. Of course I forgive you, Lenk, dear. And I hope I never have to spank you again.”

Alexandra giggled. “Don’t be absurd, Captain. Of course you will! Once before bed tonight, and again first thing tomorrow morning, before his next lesson.”

Lenk tried to wipe his tears away on the back of his hands, but they just kept coming. He held his head back and sobbed, before clinging to Captain Anita’s skirts. She knelt, and drew him into a soft hug, shushing him gently, and patting his bottom. “This poor little tail will need some time to heal before tonight. Come along, Lenk, I have a soothing ointment to help it feel a little better. It’s not magic, but it will help numb the pain.”

Lenk accepted the hug eagerly, desperate for any form of comfort.

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From the outlook atop the highest tower, Princess Charlotte looked out over the courtyard with cold interest. Then, she overheard the sound of distant crying, and glanced down. “Interesting. That’s the boy who fancied himself a rebel. The one General Alexandra adopted as her own... I wonder if he really has long, pointy ears.”

Even from a distance, Charlotte could make out the boy’s bright red bottom as he followed the two women inside the barracks. Charlotte smiled. “Well, at least he’s not being spoiled.”

[End of Chapter II]

Lenk's Adventure in Heelfall

Chapter 3: Promise

By Yu May and Goji

It was just another day at Princess Charlotte's castle. Women knights and their girl squires were milling out of the fencing hall after a hard morning of training. A few paused to giggle as they watched Captain Anita unceremoniously deposit young Lenk over her lap, bare his bottom, and begin spanking him soundly.

Lenk had performed especially well in fencing today. None of the grown knights, with the exceptions of Captain Anita and General Alexandra, could withstand him.

But ever since Lenk's defeat at the hands of Captain Anita, she had taken a personal interest in training him, determined to see the boy reach his full potential. And regardless of how Lenk performed, every session ended the same way.

If Lenk did poorly, Anita would bare him herself, chiding him for his laziness and stupidity as she hauled him roughly across her knee. But today, Anita had congratulated him on his progress, before she politely invited him to bare himself and lay across her lap.

As the spanking carried on, Lenk grunted, then went silent.

Without pausing the castigation for a moment, Captain Anita nodded approvingly. "The pup is quite strong-willed... for a boy at least."

General Alexandra sighed as she watched the proceedings. "That's a polite way to say my boy's a stubborn ox."

A hush fell over the fencing hall, and Captain Anita's hand hovered in mid air. General Alexandra stiffened, and turned to find another woman had appeared at the entrance way.

Princess Charlotte strode at a relaxed pace, holding her head high. She was blond, and dressed in decorative armor that doubled as a ball gown, but her prim clothing only complemented her sleek, athletic figure. "By the Goddess, Captain Anita, did the lad do so poorly? You've been spanking that pathetic little boy every morning for the past week."

Instantly, Alexandra knelt. "Your highness."

Hurriedly, Anita set Lenk on his feet, his undergarments still tangled around his ankles, and pressed the back of his head to force him to bow along with her.

Princess Charlotte looked at Lenk carefully. "Ah, so this is your adopted son, General Alexandra? The famous boy rebel?"

Alexandra nodded. "Yes, my lady. Lord Chapman led the foolish lad astray with his masculinist treachery. I assure you, Lenk has been sternly punished."

"Perhaps. But his offense is against the crown, and the penalty for treason must be severe. He will have to be brought before us for judgment. Does your son know how to behave himself?"

Lenk lifted his head to speak, but before he could speak, General Alexandra subtly pinched his arm. Quickly, Alexandra answered. "He is not of this land, and the ways of his people are strange. Please permit me to instruct him, so that he will know how to speak properly before a daughter of royalty."

Princess Charlotte giggled. “Very well. A week or two should be plenty of time to drill a few manners into his head... or burn it onto his backside, rather. Expert my summons within a fortnight. And, Captain Anita, do keep up his sword training. I think I’d miss having the opportunity to overhear the musical sounds of a naughty boy being spanked on my morning walks.”

Alexandra and Anita bowed their heads lower, and answered together. “Yes, my lady!”

Princess Charlotte let the moment hang, then silently turned and strode out the room.

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For the next week, Lenk continued his fencing practice every morning. After Captain Anita finished his daily spanking, he was sent to study with General Alexandra, who coached him on courtly etiquette. Lenk earned more than a few spankings for being slow on the uptake, but once Alexandra explained the danger of his situation, Lenk was eager to be instructed. By participating in a rebellion against the crown, Lenk had technically committed a capital offense. Though the death penalty had fallen out of favor in the Queendom Heelfall, Princess Charlotte still held the power to absolve Lenk, or condemn him.

Princess Charlotte’s summons came after a week and two days, while a bare-bottomed Lenk was still bent over Captain Anita’s knee after a particularly embarrassing performance in fencing practice.

Anita and Alexandra marched alongside Lenk towards Princess Charlotte’s private chamber. Outside the door, Alexandra knelt to look Lenk in the eye. “Remember, my son, you have committed a terrible crime. Princess Charlotte is not without mercy, but you must show proper deference. I... do not wish to lose you.”

Lenk surprised Alexandra with a hug. “I won’t let you down, Mother.”

Alexandra patted Lenk across his back. A man-servant opened the grand door, and bowed out of the way. “Her highness is prepared to receive Lenk, the boy rebel.”

Captain Anita narrowed her eyes. “Has her highness requested our presence?”

The man-servant glanced at Lenk once, then shook his head nervously. “My apologies, Captain, but her highness specifically requested that she wishes to see the boy... alone.”

General Alexandra held tight Lenk’s hand, before he gave her hand a squeeze and let go. Lenk marched into the room, and heard the man-servant shut the door behind him. Princess Charlotte’s private quarters were immaculately furnished, tapestries, a bookcase, a canopy bed. Princess Charlotte was seated at a workdesk, and casually set aside a hefty book trimmed with gold. “Ah, the wild boy warrior. Come closer, lad, I want to get a good look at you.”

Lenk nodded curtly, forcing himself to remember Princess Isolde’s face, and strode to stand before Princess Charlotte. This awful woman wasn’t his friend, but she was still a princess, and it was the duty of a knight to honor a princess. “As Your Highness commands. I am at your–”

Suddenly, Princess Charlotte scooped Lenk up under his armpits, and deposited him across her lap. “Now, let’s discuss the price of rebellion against the crown.”

Without further ado, Princess Charlotte flipped Lenk’s skirt up, and grabbed the waistband of his white breeches. Taken by surprise, Lenk started to struggle, before his muscle memory kicked in and he forced himself to hold still. “Your highness? What are you–”

Princess Charlotte yanked down Lenk's breeches, revealing his bottom, still covered with faded, pink, handprint-shaped marks, before she delivered a firm swat. "Don't worry, child, I won't have you executed for treason. But I'm afraid you still need a good, hard spanking for the part you played in Lord Chapman's treachery. That should suffice to remind you of your place."

With that, Charlotte began to spank Lenk at a firm, steady pace. Lenk gasped, but resisted the urge to fight back.

Charlotte's slaps weren't as strong as General Alexandra's heavy-handed approach, nor as precise as Captain Anita's well-aimed strokes, but Princess Charlotte spanked without hesitation, holding her head high with a certain royal grace. After delivering a good ten slaps, Charlotte raised an eyebrow, and paused the spanking. "You see, I'm afraid all little boys like you are inherently naughty, and must be spanked. It is a law of nature. Sooner or later, every misbehaving boy must be spanked soundly by his mother, so it is only proper that young men continue to receive proper instruction, well past boyhood. I can see General Alexandra has trained you well on how to properly accept chastisement..."

Charlotte began the spanking again. Lenk yelped, but held still. Charlotte giggled. "Tee hee! Do not be ashamed to cry out. There is no point in pretending it doesn't hurt, nor in trying to save face. Once a wicked little boy is bent over the knee, he has no dignity left worth preserving anymore. That is the only way to learn humility. In your case, you need it all the more because of your rebellious spirit."

Lenk cried, and despite his best efforts, two tears spilled down his eyes. Charlotte laughed imperiously, and spanked faster, with just enough controlled force to let Lenk overhear her lecturing. "After all the discipline I witnessed you receive, I was quite prepared to forgive you. But when I came to visit you at the fencing hall, I still saw a little, sparkling ember of resistance in your eyes. I intend to extinguish it."

Charlotte delivered a ferocious spank, then paused to admire her handiwork. Lenk whimpered as he felt her lightly patting his bottom. Charlotte stroked Lenk's bottom in a way that would have been gentle, if not for the fact that it awakened the keen sting of the earlier slaps. "Don't worry, child. Your mother and your teacher have done well. I can see you've learned to take a proper spanking... most properly."

Charlotte lifted her hand, and rang a bell attached to a string behind her head, and called. "Door man!"

The door slowly creaked open, and the man-servant bowed his way in. "Your highness? I am yours to command."

Charlotte giggled, ignoring Lenk's whining as she delicately traced her finger along his upturned bottom. "Aww! Your reactions are simply adorable... Oh, man-servant, see General Alexandra and Captain Anita into my chambers."

The servant obeyed. As they approached, Alexandra and Anita knelt. Charlotte groaned, and delivered a firm whack that made Lenk howl. Charlotte seemed to savor the echoing sound. "Oh, please, enough with the formality. There's no point in courtly manners when you have a mewling boy bent over the knee. On your feet, both of you."

As Alexandra and Anita stood, Charlotte delivered another ferocious slap. Lenk screamed, but held still across her lap. Charlotte hummed, with an undisguised expression of admiration. "I'd expected the wild boy to disgrace himself, but he certainly knows how to obediently submit to a spanking. I really must commend both of you. Your barbarian son may become a proper gentleman yet, Lexi."

Alexandra nodded. "Thank you, my lady. Does that mean you approve of my earnest wish to adopt him as my own son?"

“Of course! Already, I think this boy has benefited immensely from your maternal guidance... But I must ask you to indulge me. You see, I’ve taken quite a liking to this wild boy. So, I will be assuming full responsibility for training and discipline from now on.”

Alexandra and Anita glanced at one another nervously. As she noticed their expressions, Charlotte laughed musically. “Oh dear, perhaps you think me spoiled? Fear not, General Alexandra. As his adopted mother, you will have full parental authority over the lad. And Anita, I’d like you to continue his instruction in fencing, and continue to spank him as often as needed to reinforce the lessons.”

Charlotte landed another resounding slap across Lenk’s toasty, hot pink buns, then began to spank at a slow steady pace. “But every night, before the sun sets, I want to be the one to give little Lenk his bedtime spanking. That should suffice as a punishment for his treason. The sight of Lenk’s spanked bottom will serve as a lasting reminder to all rebellious men of the price of disobedience. But I am not without mercy. Lenk will be trained to serve as a Queen’s consort.”

Alexandra glanced at Charlotte’s bed. “A consort? Do you mean... you wish for the boy to sleep in your bedchamber?”

Charlotte chuckled, then spanked Lenk harder. “Oh, don’t worry. Nothing untoward. I only wish to get to know the lad better. Of course, when he comes of age, it may be a different matter. But if you will consent to give him over to my care, I swear on my royal oath that I will guard and cherish your son, as I would my own. If you wish, you may join us, to supervise his nightly bedtime spankings.”

Alexandra nodded. “Thank you, your Highness. I would be glad to remit my son to your care. Lenk, you owe the Princess your gratitude. She does you a great honor.”

Lenk tried to say something, before a particularly ferocious spank cut him off. As he roared a warbling cry, Charlotte began to spank him in earnest. “I’ll admit, you have some skill. But you were too arrogant, coming into this land, thinking you could overthrow the empire by yourself. Now your overconfidence has earned you a punishment!”

Charlotte delivered two claps in quick succession, then fell into a steady pattern, increasing the speed of the beating. “A sound, bare-handed spanking, to put you back in line.”

Lenk answered with a ferocious war cry that melted into a boyish whimper. Charlotte shook her head, smiling. “This is the consequence you have to bear for being disrespectful and rude. Humiliation to cut far deeper than an executioner’s axe.”

Lenk gasped to catch his breath, and shouted. “S-stop!”

For a moment, Charlotte actually did stop, pressing the back of her hand against her mouth as she laughed delicately. “Fu fu fu! Already begging for mercy? Did you think this wouldn’t be so bad? Another miscalculation. Learn to stop thinking already. Little boys should be seen, and not heard!”

Lenk started to kick, all thoughts of his former resolve to stay strong now long forgotten. “Noooo! Please, no more!”

Charlotte sniffed, and clapped Lenk lightly across each of his sit spots. “As for requesting leniency, I’m afraid that you have missed your chance. Once corporal punishment has begun, there can be no forbearance.”

Charlotte increased the pace of the spanking, delivering each clap with lightning-speed. Lenk wailed, then melted into uncontrolled tears. Charlotte nodded, savoring the sound of Lenk's cries. "Yes, as my guiding hand of chastisement falls upon you, let your tears likewise fall freely. Do not hold back. Scream in agony. When I am done with you, you will completely submit to female authority. Never again will you be able to sit comfortably on this cute little backside. You will forget you were ever a rebel. Do you understand, little boy? Show me that you have learned your lesson!"

Lenk bellowed, straining with all his might, before he collapsed back down across Charlotte's lap, too exhausted to resist.

Charlotte slowed the pace of the spanking, without softening the force of her blows. "That's more like it. But don't worry. Once I'm sure your haughty spirit is completely broken, I will forgive you. As a matter of fact..."

Carefully, Charlotte scooped Lenk up, and sat him down on her lap, gentling him. "... I think I'm growing quite fond of you already!"

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Night after night, week after week, Lenk was summoned to Princess Charlotte's bedchamber. Each night, General Alexandra acted as a witness for each bedtime spanking session, unless she was called away to battle. On those nights, Captain Anita acted as a surrogate witness. Every night, Lenk was whipped soundly by Princess Charlotte, who reminded him of his rebellion against the Queendom. Some nights, Charlotte would drill Lenk in reading and writing, or deliver a sermon on the importance of men submitting to women in holy matrimony, as would please the Goddess.

Lenk endured sitting on a sore backside throughout the lessons, but he enjoyed learning to read the strange new language at least. Every night, after sunset, a servant would help swaddle Lenk tightly in blankets, under strict instructions that he was not to break free from his bundle, before he was laid down alongside Princess Charlotte in her bed. Lenk didn't understand the purpose of this bizarre ceremony, and chalked it up to the women of Heelfall having strange customs.

He learned that Princess Charlotte was a terrible snorer, but apart from the spankings, he found the bedtime ritual of being tucked in strangely comforting.

This nightly routine continued, until a royal messenger arrived at Princess Charlotte's castle, with great fanfare. The Queen-Empress wished to visit, and Princess Charlotte was instructed to ready a royal welcome. As Lenk listened to the messenger dryly reading from his scroll, he noticed something odd. At the mention of Queen Leda's name, and her orders to "take great pains" to prepare the castle, all the women present, including Princess Charlotte, slowly covered their bottoms, as if they were all a bunch of nervous, naughty little girls.

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Lenk pouted as Princess Charlotte carried him in her arms. His old tunic had been deemed unsuitable. And so, after enduring dozens of spankings for disobedience, Lenk had finally allowed himself to be dressed in the absurd, formal attire for young princes of Heelfall. General Alexandra and Captain Anita followed close behind, looking nervous. That fact disturbed Lenk. He'd never seen them look so intimidated.

Princess Charlotte bent low to whisper in Lenk's ear. "Lenk, darling, be sure to remember your manners. Mother can be quite... strict, but she has a compassionate heart for repentant boys."

Lenk's eyes popped open as he took in the Queen-Empress's throne room. There was a long, red carpet leading toward the throne, and the walls were covered in tapestries that depicted men bowling low before an imposing, queenly figure.

Queen Leda sat at her throne, towering above them all. Leda was even taller than General Alexandra, and wore her blond hair in a short, prim style. Her formal dress was low cut, revealing a mature, matronly bosom. Princess Charlotte cleared her throat. "Queen Mother, may I present young Lenk, a visitor from the land of Avalon. And if you will consent to the match... my future husband?"

Leda examined Lenk with a mysterious, half-lidded gaze. "Oh my, isn't he the cutest thing? Let me have a look at him, Charlotte."

Charlotte stiffened, before she set Lenk down on his feet.

Leda waved her gloved hand to beckon Lenk. "Yes, come here, little one."

Lenk marched to approach the Queen's throne. Internally, he rehearsed the argument he had prepared. He didn't care about this stuffy old empress and her rules. He was going to plead for the cause of the men of Heelfall, and demand his liberty.

Then Leda bent low, pinched him by the ear, and tugged him forward, pinning him between her knees. "Good boy. Just look at his pointed ears. So easy to pinch. Now, child, Princess Charlotte has informed me that you've been punished, severely, for your naughtiness, but I'm afraid I have no patience for rebellious men. Whether royal or common, disobedient boys deserve proper punishment. And for such a treacherous crime, the punishment must be severe."

Lenk grabbed Leda's hand, only for her to release her hold on his ear, and grip his pants, tugging them down below his bottom. Lenk squealed with embarrassment, before Leda

lifted him up and pulled him across her lap. “How delightful! The look on his face while I bared his bottom was simply adorable… not to mention the bottom itself.”

Leda delivered the first slap, and Lenk gasped. He wanted to scream, but the force of the blow had knocked the wind out of him. It was harder than anything he’d ever felt before. Leda tittered. “Fu fu fu. It’s too late to plead for mercy. Your tears and screams will change nothing.”

Then, Leda delivered a second, thunderous spank. This time, Lenk screeched in agony. Leda patted Lenk’s bottom, until his screams died down, and turned her attention to General Alexandra. “Alexandra? I’m aware that you’ve adopted this boy as your own son, but I expect this little boy to call me ‘Mommy’ from now on. After all, he will be marrying Princess Charlotte, once he grows up.”

Princess Charlotte’s face brightened. “Really, Mother? So you approve of my choice?”

Leda landed a third spank, with such force, it seemed to send a tremor reverberating through the throne room. “Don’t ask such obvious questions, Charlotte. Now, as to my future son-in-law…”

Sensing something bad was coming, Lenk kicked his heels behind him. Charlotte scowled, her nostrils flaring. “None of that. Mommy is not going to stop your punishment until she’s satisfied your attitude has been corrected.”

Leda landed two quick spanks, then raised her hand high. “Prove your remorse with obedience. Answer Mommy’s questions earnestly. Are you going to treat my daughter with respect, as befits a Princess of her rank?”

Lenk roared in answer. “Yes! On my honor as a knight, I swear–”

Leda cut Lenk off with a tremendous swat, aimed across the center of his bottom. Her hefty palm easily covered both of the boy's butt cheeks. "Feh! So easily tamed. We'll continue your discipline later, then. In the meantime, go stand in the corner, nose against the wall. We'll have you present your red, spanked bottom to the entire royal court, as a warning to any secret friends of Lord Chapman who may harbor sympathy for his cause."

It took Lenk a few moments before he comprehended the meaning of Leda's words, which he could only dimly make out. His buttocks was tingling so madly, he could barely register anything else. Hiccuping, Lenk crept to stand in the corner, and risked a glimpse at his red, raw, rear end. Soon, all the royal nobles of Heelfall would be getting a glimpse of it too.

Leda clicked her tongue. "No peeking, young man. Think about what you did, and about what's coming to you."

Quickly, Lenk turned his face away. Leda watched him for a few moments, then turned her attention to Princess Charlotte. "To be honest, I'm surprised he didn't break down begging and struggling from the first swat. But there is still room for improvement. Charlotte, you'll have to take a firm hand with him, if he's ever to grow into a suitable Queen's consort. I'll have to instruct you on the art of taming a man."

Charlotte beamed. "Yes, Queen mother. I'll submit to your guidance. As will my husband-to-be."

Leda snickered. "Of course he will. Was there ever any doubt? All men should be terrified of their mothers-in-law."

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Princess Charlotte sighed as she examined herself in the mirror. “You really think this wedding dress will still be in fashion, when Lenk comes of age?”

Captain Anita adjusted her glasses. “I’m no expert on fashion, but that dress was sewed by a master seamstress. Good craftswomanship will never go out of style. Don’t you agree, General?”

With a start, General Alexandra looked up from the locket she’d been admiring. She’d commissioned a miniature painting of her spanking Lenk, as a memento of the day she had adopted him. Quickly, she stuffed it into her bosom, and cleared her throat. “I think it’s still a bit early to be taking measurements. Lenk still has a few years of growing up to do.”

Princess Charlotte stuck her nose in the air, fixing her bodice. “Of course, but it never hurts to be prepared. A woman’s wedding dress is her last chance to wear something so… frilly, before she’s forced to wear the pants in the household for the rest of her life.”

General Alexandra nodded. “Yes, men may be the weaker sex, but I must admit, adopting Lenk as my son has begun to change my perspective.”

Captain Anita shrugged. “Men. We can’t live with ‘em. And you can’t live without ‘em!”

Charlotte sniggered. “Too true! Now, I’d like to show Lenk how I look in my dress.”

Captain Anita blinked. “But… isn’t that bad luck?”

“There’s no such thing as bad luck. Besides, a young man ought to have every opportunity to tell his future-wife how beautiful she looks.”

Before anyone could object, Princess Charlotte strode out of the room, holding a bouquet in front of her. She hummed the tune of a traditional Heelfall wedding march to herself as she stepped down the corridor towards her private bed chamber. “Lenk, darling, I have something lovely to show you. Now, be sure to compliment me, but not in a stupid obvious way. I want you to say things that make my heart flutter, without actually having to spell out every little…”

Princess Charlotte opened her chamber door, expecting to find Lenk right where she’d left him, bent bare bottomed over her personal chest of jewelry. But the chest was open, and empty.

General Alexandra bumped into Princess Charlotte from behind, and scanned the room with a look of horror. The bed had been stripped, and the bed sheets tied into a long rope, which led out the window.

On Princess Charlotte’s bed, they found a note.

“Dear General Alexandra, thank you for adopting me. I never knew my mother. She died to protect me while I was still a baby. I don’t think anyone will be as good a mom as her, but I know you tried your best.

Captain Anita, thank you for teaching me to counter the longsword school of fencing. I look forward to meeting you on the field of battle, though I hope it will be as friends of the men of Heelfall, rather than as enemies.

To Princess Charlotte, you’re a very sweet person, and I hope you find the good husband you are looking for one day. If I ever find a good husband on my journey, I will tell him to come and marry you, but you have to promise to be nice to him.

Good bye!

Your friend,

Lenk!"

As Princess Charlotte's eyes blazed with fire, Lenk's note burnt to a crisp in her hand. "That little scamp! When I get my hands on him, I'll teach him to trifle with a lady's heart!"

[The End]